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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

The Sparrow Net

publisher
Mike Richardson

series editor
Philip Simon

collection editor
Chris Warner

collection designer
Scott Cook

art director
Lia Ribacchi

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL VOL. 18
THE SPARROW NET
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This volume collects issues one hundred eighteen through one hundred twenty-six of the Dark Horse comic-book series *Blade of the Immortal*.

Dark Horse Manga
A division of Dark Horse Comics, Inc.
10956 SE Main Street
Milwaukie, OR 97222

darkhorse.com

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First edition: February 2008
ISBN 978-1-59307-871-3

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in the United States of America

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story
HIROAKI SAMURA

translation
Dana Lewis

lettering and retouch
Tomoko Saito

The Sparrow Net

DARK HORSE MANGA™

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Swastika

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from *su* — "well" + *asti* "he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the swastika was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The arms of the *swastika*, which point in a clockwise direction, are generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. The *sauvastika* generally stands for night, and often for magical practices. It is important that readers understand that the swastika has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century [ca. 1782–3]. *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

The Artwork

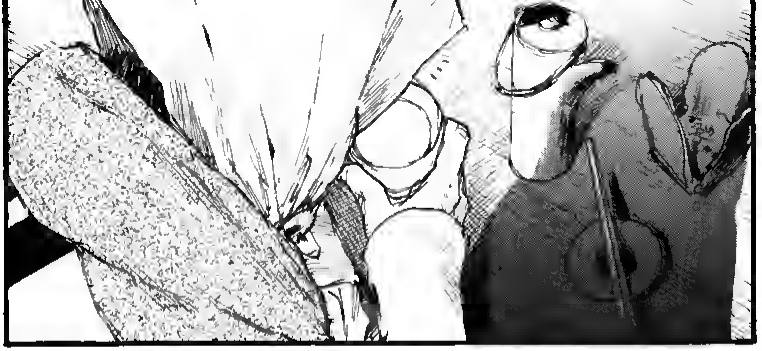
The creator of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Normally, Westernized manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and re-pasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue

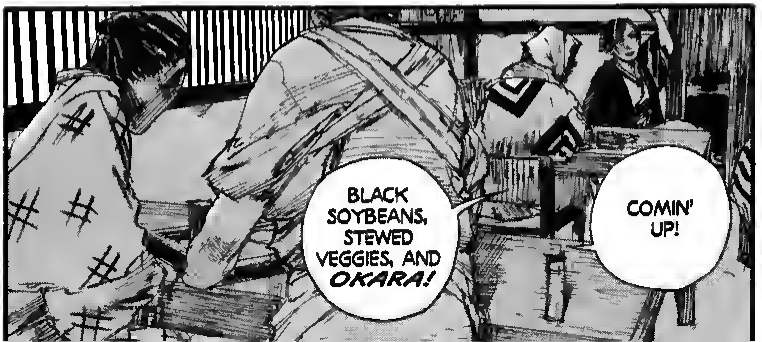
Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the illustrations, we decided to leave those in their original Japanese. We hope readers will view the unretouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in typical samurai manga and is considered to be one of the features that has made *Blade* such a hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, with some characters speaking in the mannered style of old Japan while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

THE SPARROW NET

Part 1

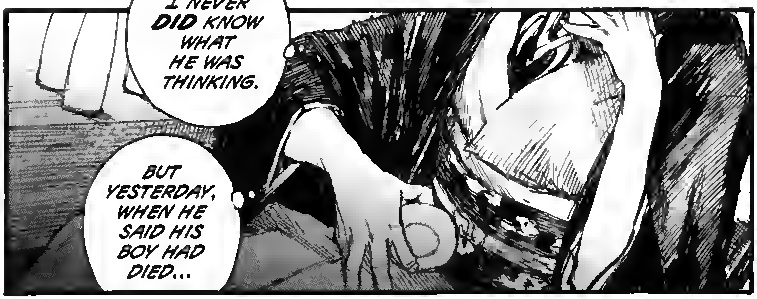


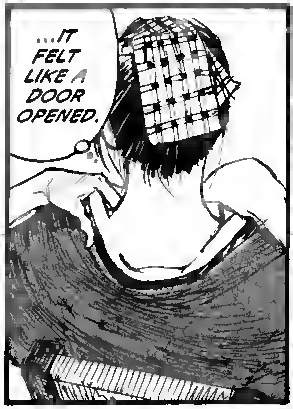
ANYONE SITTING HERE?


BLACK SOYBEANS, STEWED VEGGIES, AND *OKARA!*
COMIN' UP!

.....
.....
.....
hhhff...
THAT BALD-IE...
I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO TELL HER.
HYAKURIN. GO ON AHEAD.
SOMETHING YOU DON'T WANT ME TO KNOW?

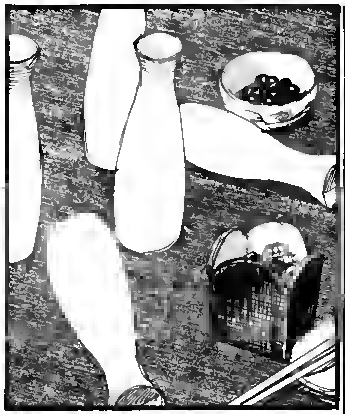
SOMETHING THAT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS.
WHAT ?!
HMF!
SMALL FRY...?
JUST A NO-BODY...?


I NEVER DID KNOW WHAT HE WAS THINKING.
BUT YESTERDAY, WHEN HE SAID HIS BOY HAD DIED...


...IT FELT LIKE A DOOR OPENED.

I THOUGHT... HE MIGHT LET ME PEEK IN.

AND THEN WHAT?
I'M NOT WORTHY...?



YOU ALL ALONE?

...AS YOU SEE.
OH, NOT *THAT*.
LIKE, IS THERE A WIFE?
...IN A WAY.
AH HAH HAH! SORRY! BUT DRINKING *ALONE*, YOU KNOW?
SO DULL YOU JUST DON'T TASTE YOUR SAKE OR FOOD ANYMORE.
ANY KIDS?
...NOT YET.
GUESS NOT. YOU LOOK *YOUNG*.
BUT DON'T TELL ME YOU DON'T WANT AN HEIR?

...HMM... I WONDER.
PERHAPS NOT...
...WOW...
THAT'S PRETTY WEIRD.
I MEAN, EVEN SOME DIRT-POOR SAMURAI OUT THERE WANTS HIS HEIR SO BAD...
...HE'D JUST AS SOON KILL A GIRL AT BIRTH IF IT HELPED HIS SON SURVIVE.
BUT KNOW WHAT? YOU'RE OKAY... WHO NEEDS HEIRS? I FEEL FOR A SAMURAI'S SON.
LAYING ALL THAT PARENTAL SHIT ON HIM. DREAMS. AMBITIONS.

IT'S FUNNY WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT.
JUST 'CAUSE SOMEONE'S GOT HALF YOUR BLOOD... YOU MAKE *HIM* CLEAN UP YOUR MESS.
...'BOUT KIDS DYING BEFORE THEIR FOLKS.
I MEAN, WORLD'S *FULL* OF STORIES...
OH.
SORRY.
DON'T LISTEN TO ME. I'M JUST... REMEMBER-ING.
ACTUAL-LY...

...IN A SAMURAI CLAN I KNOW...
...THE SON DIED BEFORE THE FATHER.
AND IT SEEMS SOME UNFUL-FILLED DREAMS...
...WERE THEN FORCED UPON THE GRAND-SON.
YEAH?
IN MY OPINION...
...IF A MAN TALKS OF DREAMS AND AMBI-TIONS...
...HE SHOULD BE PREPARED TO ACHIEVE THEM HIMSELF... IN HIS OWN LIFETIME.
IT'S ABSURD TO PASS THEM ON TO AN HEIR.
A MAN SHOULD REALIZE... WHEN HIS DREAMS ARE JUST TOO BIG.

UH-HUHN...
YEAH... YOU'RE RIGHT.
YOU SAY GOOD THINGS.
ONLY...
...IF A CHILD MUST HONOR INHERITED AMBI-TIONS...
...WHAT CAN HE DO BUT POUR HIS SOUL INTO THE CHASE?
NOT SAYING "NO" WHILE HE STILL CAN.
NOT QUESTION-ING GOOD OR EVIL...
...OR... HIS OWN ABILITY.
NOT THINKING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS ONCE HE ACHIEVES HIS GOAL... OR IF HE CAN'T.
CHARGING BLINDLY AHEAD. HIS LIFE A HAZE.

SUCH IS THE POWER OF THE BOND BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD.
A POWER THAT SHOULD BE USED *WISELY.*
DON'T BE A FOOL AND IMPOSE YOUR DREAMS ON AN HEIR...
...BUT MAKE YOURSELF... EXCEP-TIONAL...
FIRST, ACHIEVE SOMETHING YOURSELF.
...IN A TANGIBLE OR INTANGIBLE WAY.
MAYBE THEN, AND *ONLY* THEN, YOU CAN THINK ABOUT WHO SHOULD CARRY IT ON.

...SPLEN-DID FAMILY.
AHH HAH HAH! I GET IT. YOUNG SIR, YOU GOTTA BE FROM SOME...
...EH HEH HEH.
...DOWN ON HIS LUCK.
YOU JEST. I'M JUST A KACHI...

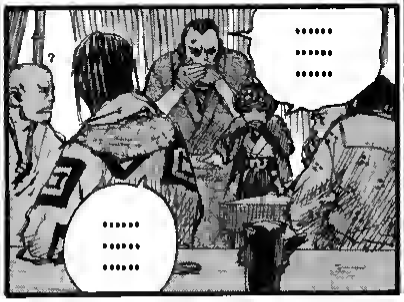
AHH... AH... HIC!
SOME-HOW, TODAY...
...THE SAKE WAS GREAT. HEH HEH!
WONDER IF... HIC ...WE'LL MEET AGAIN?
IF OUR FATES ENTWINE.
NYAHH HAH HAH HAH!
YOU'RE A GOOD MAN! YOU REALLY ARE!

TWO STORE-HOUSES. TWO...
IT'S GOTTA BE TH-*THIS* PLACE.
HAH? WAIT!
URRGF! ...MIC!

UHHH!
THINK I SAW HER YESTERDAY.
OUR CONTACT'S GOTTA--
WOW...
EEYUCK! WHAT A STINKING DIVE!
OOF!
WHAT'D SHE--?

ISAKU.
DŌA.
OVER HERE.

T-TO--
TŌSHU ?!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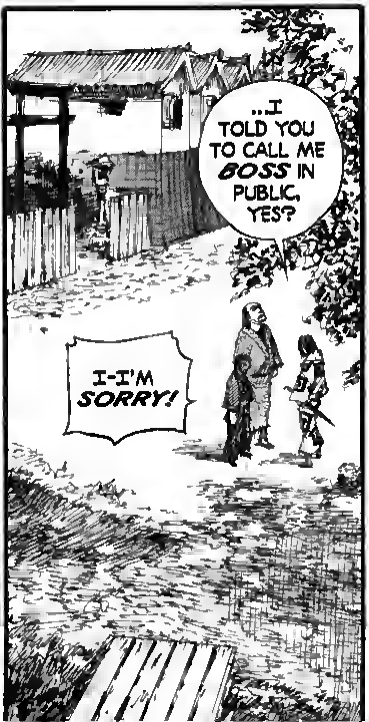

..I TOLD YOU TO CALL ME BOSS IN PUBLIC, YES?
I-I'M SORRY!

NO DOUBT YOU'VE NOTICED. THE POLICE HAVE BEEN OUT IN FULL FORCE...
...THIS PAST MONTH.
I THOUGHT IT LESS RISKY IF WE MET BY DAY.
IF THEY SAW US RENDEZVOUS AT NIGHT, THEY MIGHT ARREST US.
WATCH IT, YOU TWO! YOU'RE ALREADY WANTED.
GET IN ANY MORE TROUBLE, AND IT'S OVER. ENGRAVE THAT IN YOUR HEARTS!
WELL... ENOUGH.
DŌA. I HEAR YOU'RE GOING BY "YOSHINO"...?
YES, SIR!
I GOT THE NAME FROM THE HONCHŌ SUIKODEN THE TOSH--THE "BOSS" GAVE ME.
I PERCEIVE IN ITS IMPLICIT PATRIOTISM AN ECHO OF THE ITTŌ-RYŪ.
HOH! YOU SURPRISE ME.

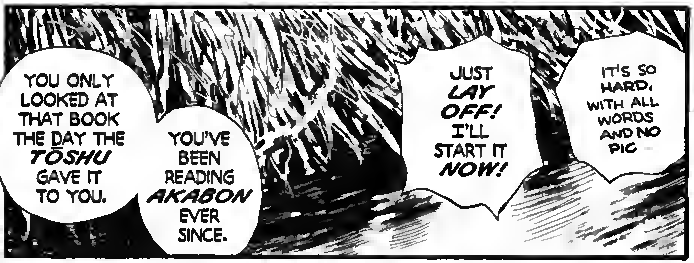
I GAVE IT TO YOU SO YOU'D LEARN MORE KANJI FOR LIFE HERE IN EDO...
...BUT I FEARED IT WAS A TRIFLE DIFFICULT.
YET YOU READ IT THROUGH. I'M DELIGHTED.
ISAKU. GIVE THIS TO KASHIN KOJI.
WE'LL MEET AGAIN IN A MONTH.
EHH?! YOU'RE LEAVING AL-READY?
YES.

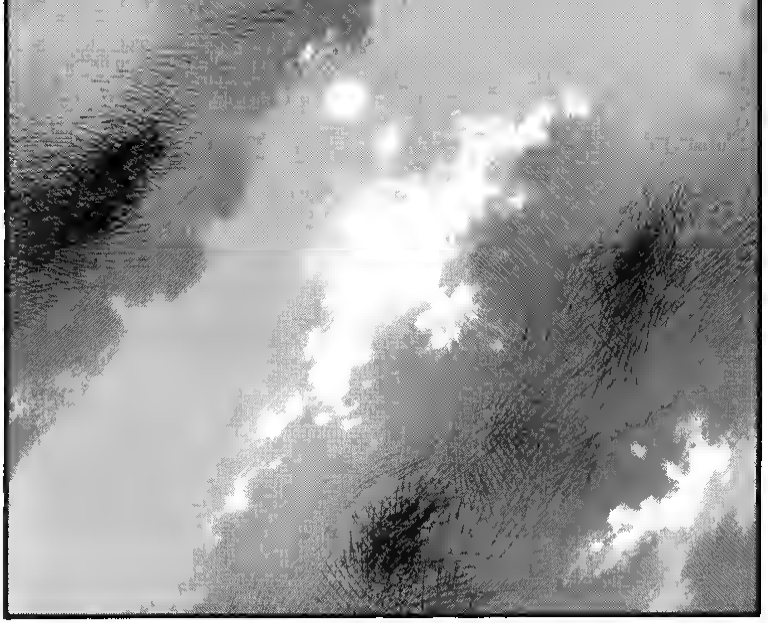
ISAKU. DŌA. WE RETURN TO BATTLE WHEN THE COLD RETURNS. THAT SHOULD PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS.
TRAIN... SO YOU DON'T GET RUSTY.

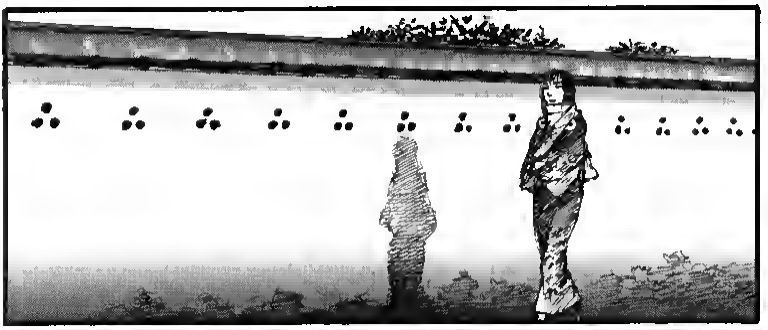
YES, SIR!

OH... MY... GAWWD...
THE TŌSHU IS SO... COOL!

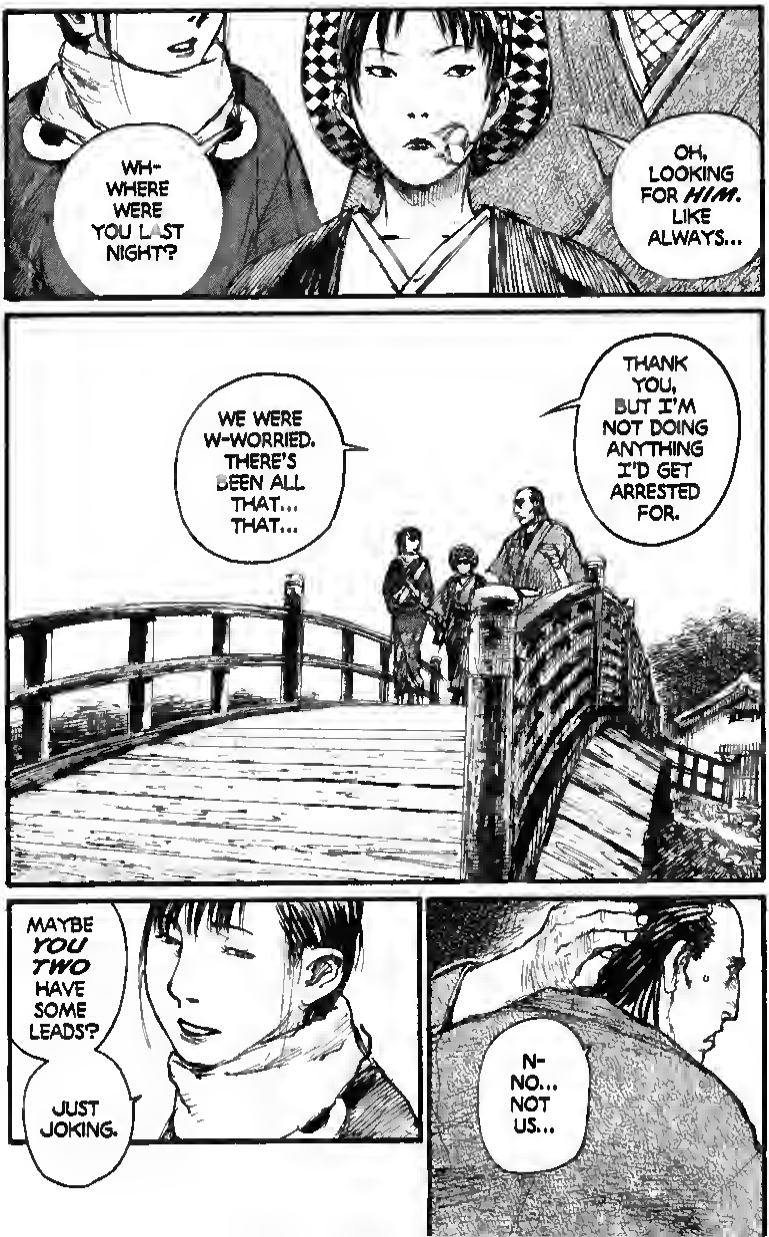
DŌ...?
TRAIN?!
YOU BET I WILL!!
JUST WATCH ME!!


YOU ONLY LOOKED AT THAT BOOK THE DAY THE TŌSHU GAVE IT TO YOU.
YOU'VE BEEN READING AKABON EVER SINCE.
JUST LAY OFF! I'LL START IT NOW!
IT'S SO HARD, WITH ALL WORDS AND NO PIC





OH?


WH-WHERE WERE YOU LAST NIGHT?
OH, LOOKING FOR *HIM*. LIKE ALWAYS...
WE WERE W-WORRIED. THERE'S BEEN ALL THAT... THAT...
THANK YOU, BUT I'M NOT DOING ANYTHING I'D GET ARRESTED FOR.
MAYBE *YOU TWO* HAVE SOME LEADS?
JUST JOKING.
N-NO... NOT US...

OH! RIGHT!
WONDER IF WE SHOULDA TOLD HIM...?
TOLD HIM WHAT?
YOU KNOW... OUR RUN-IN WITH THE DŌSHIN.
HUH? WHY? IT'S NOT LIKE WE'LL EVER SEE 'EM AGAIN.
BE-SIDES...
YOU MEN SEARCH OVER THERE!
YES, SIR!
...HE'S GOT ENOUGH WORRIES.
I G-GUESS SO.
?

?!

AH?!
WHAT THE--
?!

.....
.....

ME--
ME--
MENNN!!!
IT'S THEM!

HWSH!!
DŌA!
OWW! WHY'RE YOU--?!
HOHH! MISCRE-ANTS!

UH, UH, IF...IT'S ABOUT THE OTHER DAY...
TOLD--
HAH HAH! HAH! YOU BLOCK-HEAD!!
EXCUSES DON'T WORK ON NAKIZŌ OF THE SUMIDA!
IN OTHER WORDS... ARE YOU STUPID?! YOU THINK YOU CAN DRAW SWORDS ON THE HATCHŌ-BORI?!
AND LOOK! YOUR LITTLE GIRL'S DONE IT TWICE! TWICE!

IT'S YOUR RESPONSIBILITY AS HER GUARDIAN.
I, UH, I'M...NOT HER G-GUAR--
SHUT UP, AND YOU'RE COMING ALONG, TOO--
ONE! TWO!
THREE!
GYAH!
ZGUUOOOH!!

BOSS !!
NAKIZŌ-SAN!
ISAKU! ARM UP!
JUST LOOK AT THEIR EYES! THEY'RE OUT FOR A FIGHT!

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH! THAT'S WHAT THE TŌSHU WOULD SAY!
TIE 'EM UP! ALL THREE!!
I'M ONE OF THEM?!
ALL... RIGHT...

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

The [illegible] captive Manji is [illegible] tested, as the horrifying experiments commanded by Habaki Kagimura in the dungeons below Edo castle continue. One of Kagimura's doctors, Ayame Burando, has already gone half-mad, tormented by the sickening mutilations he intends to unlock the secret of passing Manji's amazing regenerative powers to others, and [illegible] plague-cats blows upon the air with [illegible]. Meanwhile, Manji's [illegible] foe, is deep in [illegible] to find him, but [illegible] race is on for Rin to find her immortal bodyguard before she joins him behind bars!

[illegible] *Blade of the Immortal* [illegible] Media Arts [illegible] Dark, violent, and [illegible] emotional [illegible] samurai tale [illegible] epic tale of [illegible]

$19.95

ISBN 978-1-59307-871-3

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DARK HORSE MANGA

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WINNER OF JAPAN'S 1996 Media Arts Award

無限の住人
The Sparrow Net
HIROAKI SAMURA
BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

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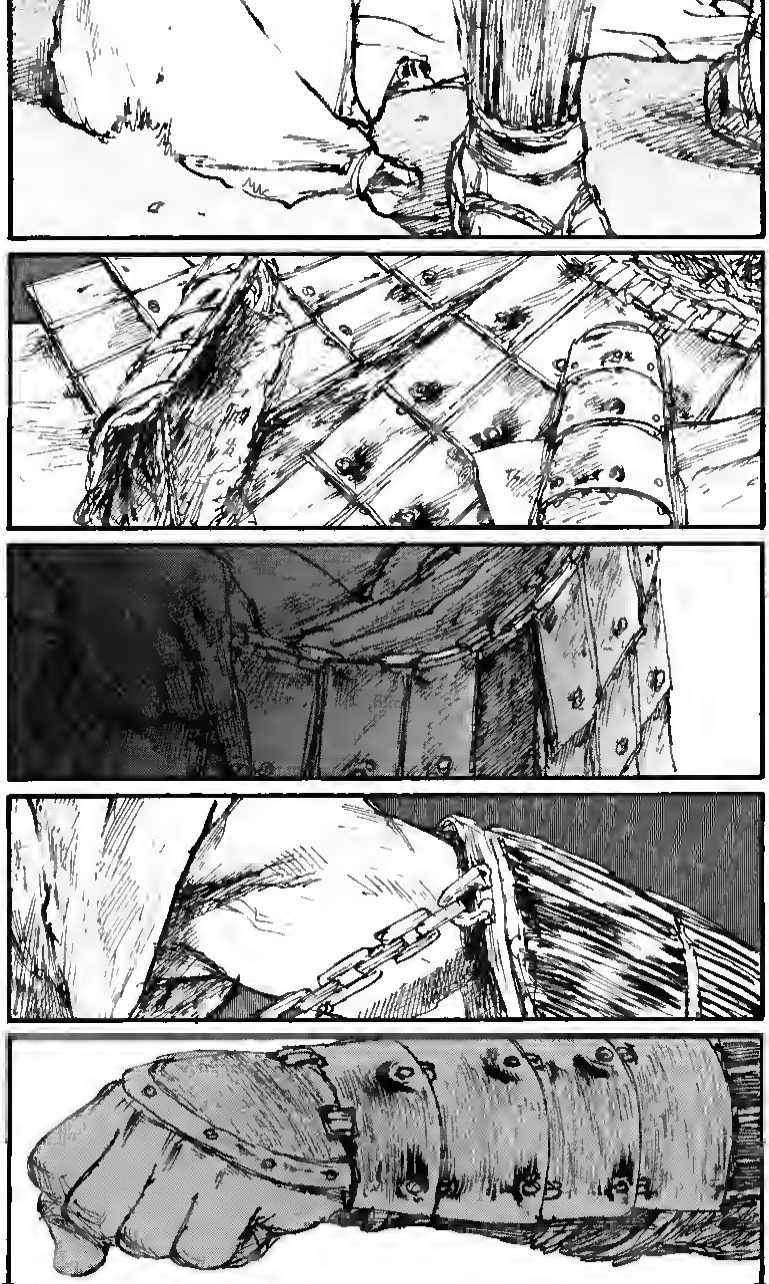
THE SPARROW NET
Part 2



GO-YŌ!
GO-YŌ!
GO-YŌ!

GO-YŌ!
GO-YŌ!

WHERE'RE YOUR STUPID LANTERNS, YOU SHOWOFFS?!
WANNA-BES!
ISAKU! STOP DŌA!
SHE'S DRAWN, BUT WE CAN TALK OUR WAY OUT.
IF SHE HURTS A HATCHŌ-BORI, IT'S DEATH ROW!
...RIN-SAN.

TH-THANKS FOR WORRYING... BUT...
...IT'S ALL THE SAME.
?
THE SAME...?
YOU BITCH!
A GUY ONLY GETS TWO OF 'EM!
SURROUND 'EM!!

!
THUD!
NNF!

SKRRS!

GO PEACE-FULLY... OR... OR...
...RESIST... AND PAY UNTIL WE DRAGGED YOU IN.
DAMN YOU... UNTIL NOW...
...YOU BASTARDS HAD A CHOICE.
NO CHOICE NOW... FUCKERS!
BUT... THAT'S HISTORY!
ISAKU!

KA-KA
KAKK!
?!
DID YOU JUST--?
AH!

GSSSSS
BEHIND YOU!
HUH? WHO?!
FUCK! FUCK!

KYAAAAH!
KYNG!
KYNG!
KYNG!
.....
.....!
ぜぇ～!

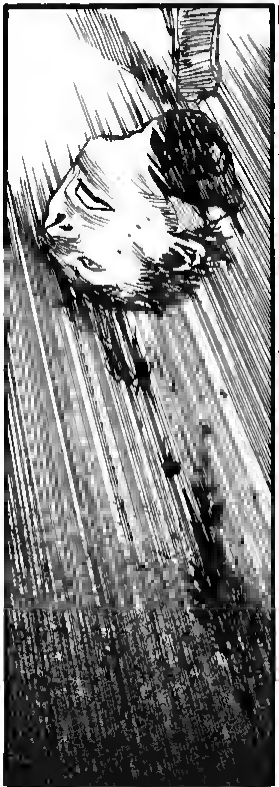
LEGGO, YOU--!!
D-DAMMIT !!

.....
.....
.....

OVER THERE!
GYAH!!
WHERE IS SHE?!

AHH-RAHH...!
"PUT UP OUR HANDS FIRST?
"NOPE!
"WE'VE KILLED PEOPLE!
"FIVE... NO, MORE."
SHIIIIT!
YAIEE!
AH...?! S-SORRY!
GOTE!

Kiiii!!!

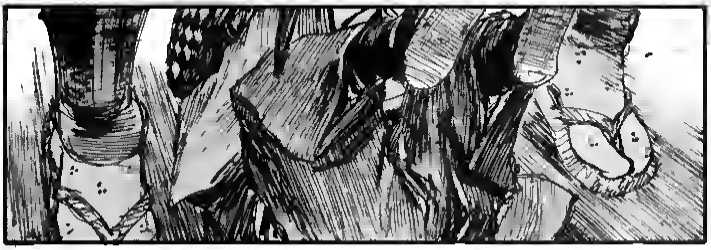


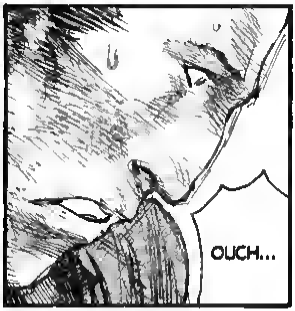
Whhf
"...DŌA.
"YOU SHALL NEVER AGAIN KILL TO STEAL.

"HAVING PASSED THROUGH ITTŌ-RYŪ'S GATE...
"...YOU MAY WIELD YOUR BLADE FOR BUT THREE REASONS.
"ONE. WHEN YOUR PRINCIPLES ARE THREATENED.
"TWO, WHEN ONE IMPORTANT TO YOU IS IN DANGER.
"THREE, WHEN YOUR OWN LIFE IS AT STAKE."
KO-BAYASHI... USE THIS.
EH?! BUT...
RIGHT. I'M IN THE CLEAR...
IS IT REALLY... OKAY?
IT'S FINE. I'LL OVERLOOK IT.

AND IS THIS *THE TIME* FOR QUESTIONS?!
IF WE DON'T KILL 'EM, WE'RE--!
YOU GUYS, *TOO!* DUMP THE *KARAMI!* THE *SASU-MATA.* THE *UCHIKOMI.*
USE YOUR *JITTE!* YOU CAN'T KEEP UP WITH HER WITH ANYTHING *LONGER.*

WHOA!




OUCH...

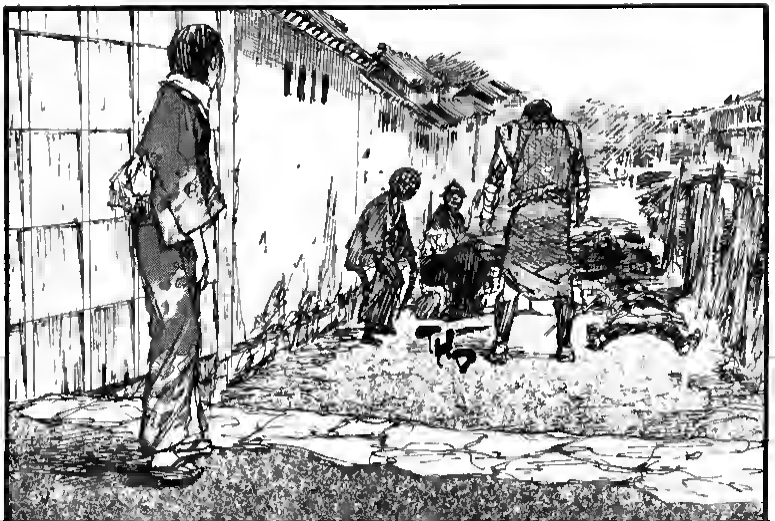
DAMN YOU! EVERY TIME!
GET OUT OF THE WAY! YOU LUMP ON A LOG!
SKRAK
KS-HOK
SASSH
HAH?
.....
.....
.....

FUCKIN'
KID...!

SHK
GUU

DŌA!!
DIE!!
JUST
DIE!!!

I... GOT HER...?
.....
.....
.....
...NOT...
...FAIR !!
THAT...
THAT'S...



MY OBI CAME LOOSE...
.....! EEK!
TEN MEN... IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE...
D-DŌA. HE'S AL-READY...
EEP!
GYAH!
NO... AIEEE!!
.....
.....
.....

DAZZLING!
IN TRUTH... INCREDIBLE.
BUT... BUT!! THEY WERE JUST...
...SOME COPS WHO HAD SOME QUESTIONS.
STRIKE FIRST? KILL EVERYONE?
HALT, HALT, HALT!!
DON'T MOVE, ANY OF YOU.
WHEN THAT'S ALL THEY WERE...?
Y-YOU CAN'T JUST TAKE THAT!

WE HEAR SCREAMING... AND WHEN WE COME TO CHECK...
...WE FIND CORPSES?! STREWN ON THE BANKS?!
AND YOU... THE MISCREANTS?

IT SEEMS WE'VE CAUGHT SOME BIG ONES.
SWORDS... ALL OF THEM!

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THE SPARROW NET
Part 3

ALL OF YOU!
SURREN-DER!

BAD... NOTHING BUT YORIKI...
...AND DŌ SHIN.
DŌA...!
YOU DON'T LET IT SHOW... BUT THE FATIGUE FROM THE FIGHT...
T- T-T- TO--
--TODOROKI-SAMA!!

HOH! NAKIZŌ, IS IT?
WHY ARE YOU WALKING LIKE THAT?
SIR! YOU'RE JUST IN TIME!
WHACK THESE VILLAINS! PLEASEEE!!
WE JUST MADE A BIG ARREST. WE WERE HEADING BACK, BUT...
NAKIZŌ. THOSE BODIES...
YOUR MEN, I PRESUME?
YES, SIR!
AND THOSE TWO DID IT, SIR! ESPECIALLY...
...THAT SHRIMP!!
THAT LITTLE MINX DID TEN OF MY MEN! AND...AND MY CROWN JEWELS!
YOU LET A GIRL KILL THEM? YOU IDIOT!!
AIIEEE! MERCY...!

WAIT, NAKIZŌ. WHAT DID *THIS* GIRL DO?
HUH?
OH! BUT *BEFORE!* BEFORE, SHE WAS *CHATTERING AWAY WITH 'EM!*
ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, SHE'S *ONE OF 'EM!*
THAT ONE? UHH...
...BASICALLY, SHE...STOOD THERE WITH HER MOUTH OPEN.
I SEE... IT SEEMS WE'LL HAVE TO PUT THE ROPES ON YOU.
HMM?

NO--
--WAY!!
O-O-SAMURAI-SAMA. SHE JUST--
SILENCE! NO EXCUSES, MIS-CREANT!
SAVE IT FOR THE O-SHIRASU!
TAKE THAT!
YEAH!
FWAP FWAP
THEY THINK I'M ONE OF THEM...
...AND I GUESS, IN A WAY, I AM.

BUT... I NEVER DREAMED...
...THEY COULD DO SOMETHING THIS INSANE!
ARREST MEANS DEATH.
I KNOW THAT, BUT--
--BUT, DOA, WHY...? IF THOSE GUYS WERE SO EASY TO BUTCHER...
...HOW HARD WOULD IT HAVE BEEN TO JUST SHAKE THEM?
ESPECIALLY... YOU?!
RIGHT! BRING THEM IN!

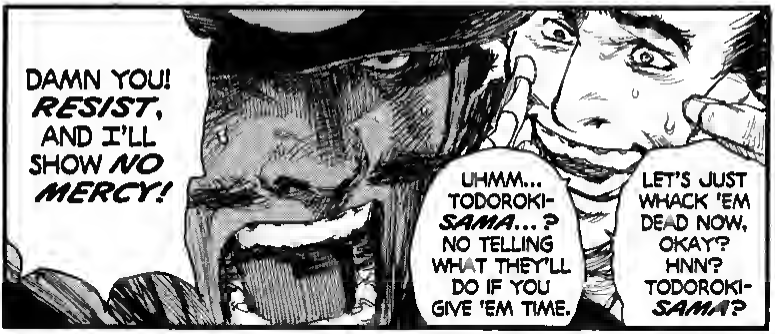
KCHK
...DŌA...
I DON'T WANT TO BE TAKEN...!
...GROSS!

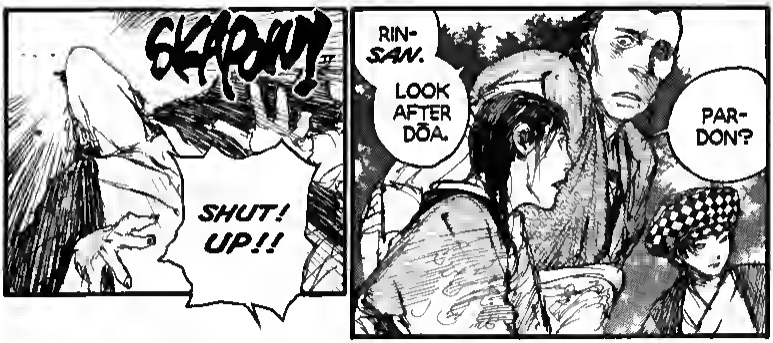
JUST YESTER-DAY, I FINALLY GOT A LEAD ON MANJI...
...AND TO HAVE IT END...? HERE?
YO, GIRL--
SPLAK!
HEY! STOP THAT!
LET ME GOOO !!
YOU IDIOT! DON'T FIGHT IT!
AH...?

HALT!
WHOA...!

SKRAAT!!
EH?
AH!
OH...
D-
DON'T...
STOP!
.....
.....
.....
SHAK!
HEEEEK!

HAH!
GOT YA!!
TOLD YOU IT WAS HOPELESS, MISSY!
OWW!
YAIEE!!
THUKK
NGNF!
KRAK!
HEY!
THOK!
ISAKU !!


DAMN YOU! RESIST, AND I'LL SHOW NO MERCY!
UHMM... TODOROKI-SAMA...? NO TELLING WHAT THEY'LL DO IF YOU GIVE 'EM TIME.
LET'S JUST WHACK 'EM DEAD NOW, OKAY? HNN? TODOROKI-SAMA?

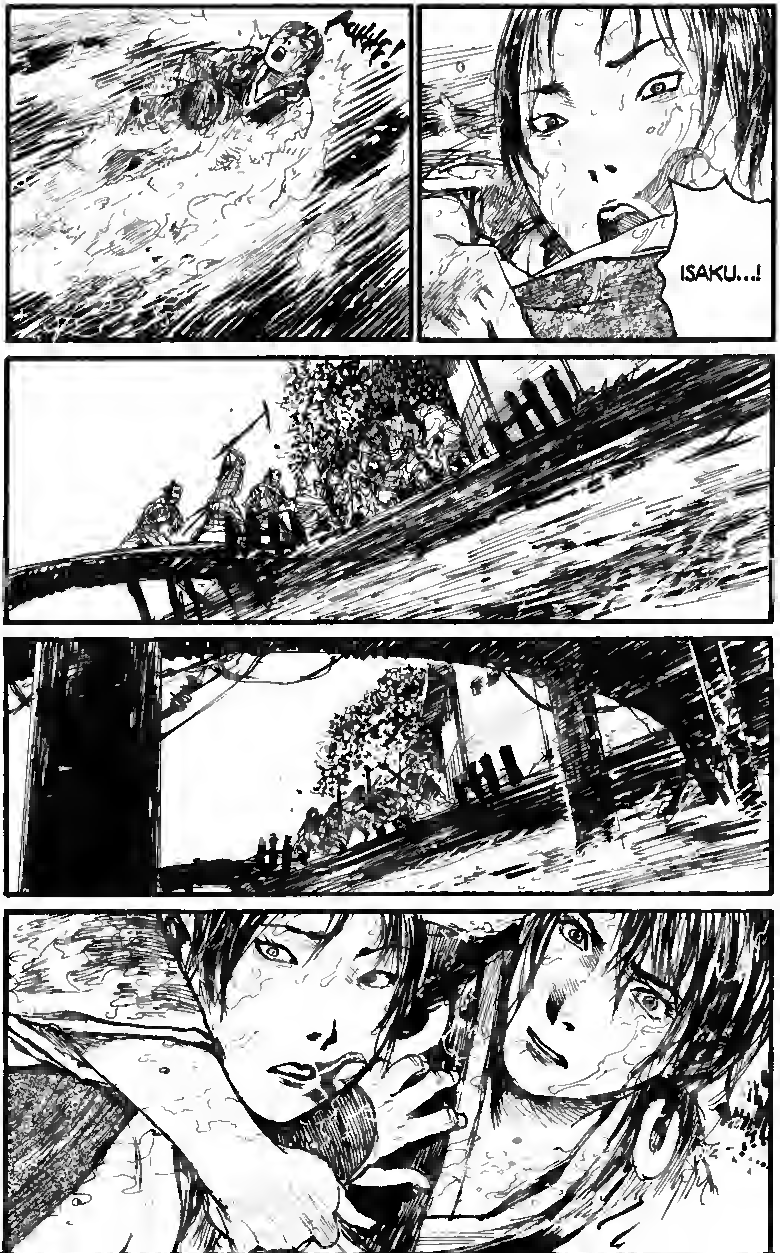

SKAPOW!
SHUT! UP!!
RIN-SAN. LOOK AFTER DŌA.
PAR-DON?

EH?
WAI--!
WHAT ARE--?!
KYUNGN!!

KRBLOOSH!

HOW...?
HOW DARE YOU?!
FISH THEM OUT!
DON'T LET THEM...
...ESCA--?!
GYA!
GYA!
YOU FOOL! LET GO OF--

TODOROKI-SAMA!!
Y-YOU FUCKIN'--!!
UKYAH! AURG!


ISAKU...!

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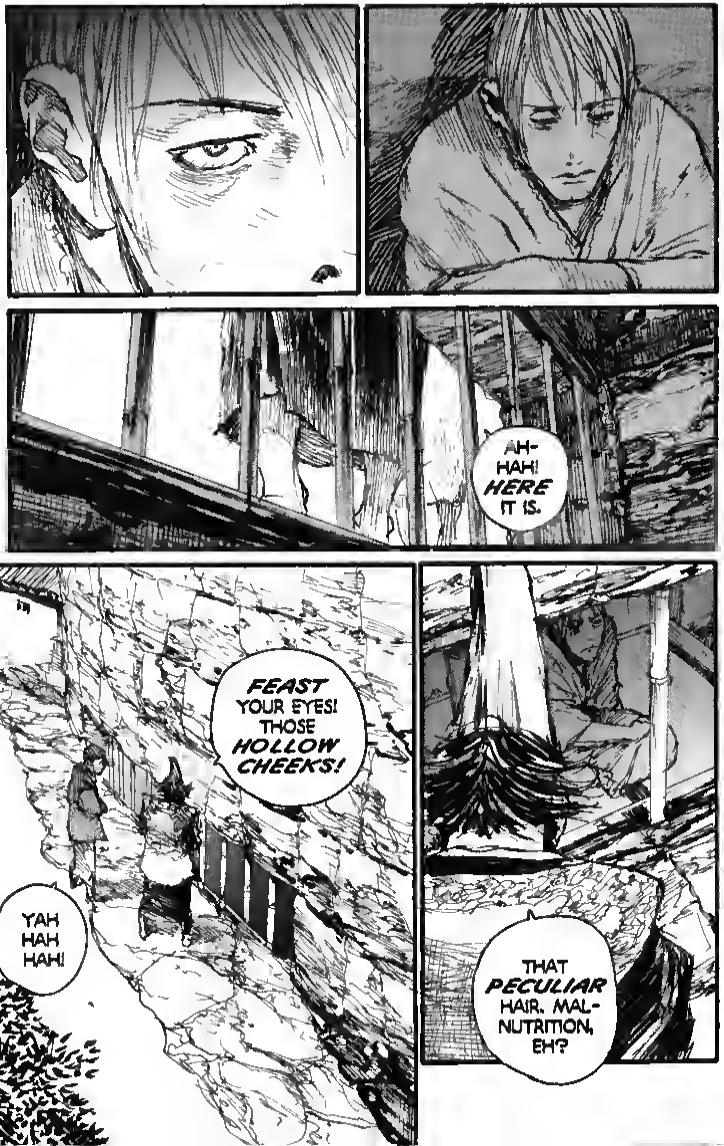

AH-HAH! HERE IT IS.
FEAST YOUR EYES! THOSE HOLLOW CHEEKS!
YAH HAH HAH!
THAT PECULIAR HAIR. MAL-NUTRITION, EH?

POOR BOY. YOUR PRECIOUS PATRON WOULD JUST HAVE TO BE...
...HABAKI KAGIMURA-DONO...
GAH
DAMN YOU!
HOW DARE A MERE TENI SPEAK THAT WAY OF A HATA-MOTO!
IDIOT! HEAR THESE WORDS! FROM THE MOUTH OF A GO-RŌJŪ!
"A SHIN-BANGATA WITHOUT SPEAR OR SOLDIERS? NOT EVEN IN THE CASTLE? TROUBLE-MAKER!
"WHO DOES HE THINK HE IS, SWEET-TALKING THE WAKADOSHIYORI TO TAKE FELONS FROM KODENMA PRISON AT WILL?
"IMPOSSIBLE TO READ... AND A ROYAL HEADACHE!" THAT'S WHAT HE SAID!

SILENCE! THE GO-RŌJŪ DON'T UNDERSTAND!
THEY DON'T SEE HOW MUCH OF WHAT HABAKI-DONO STRIVES TO DO HE DOES FOR THE GOOD OF THE PEOPLE-- INDEED, THE NATION!
HOW CAN MEN LIKE YOU JUDGE--
ALL DONE FOR THE PEOPLE, IS IT?
AND THAT'S WHY HE TREATS THE PEOPLE'S LIVES LIKE NOTHING?
THEY SAY THE MACHI-BUGYŌ AND SHŪGOKU ARE AT WITS' END.
THEY TRANSFER CONVICTS TO HABAKI-DONO AS THEY'RE TOLD...BUT NOT A ONE RETURNS.
YOU WIT-LESS FOOL!
THE WHOLE CASTLE KNOWS OF YOUR PERVERT-ED STUNTS!

YOU LET YOURSELVES GET TALKED INTO KILLING PRISONERS WITH UNHEARD CASES!
YOU SCUM ARE NO DOCTORS! HAVE YOU NO SHAME?!
THAT... THAT'S...
...TORTURED ME. IT HAS! OFTEN...
BUT... BUT WHAT COULD I DO...?
FOR ONE MAN'S LIFE TODAY... FOR HIS SACRIFICE... SOON... SOON...
...WE MAY BE ABLE TO SAVE SO MANY MORE! FACED WITH THAT PROSPECT...?
RIGHT?! IF YOU TRULY ARE A DOCTOR, SURELY YOU--
I DO NOT!! LISTEN WELL, BOY... AND YOU REMEMBER!

KOSHO-GAKU! KIN-GEI IGAKU! KOIHŌ!
IN ALL OF OUR MEDICINAL TRADITIONS, NO TRUTH CAN BE FOUND BY CARVING A LIVING PATIENT'S FLESH!
NONE!
IT'S YOUR BLIND FAITH IN RANPO THAT TORTURES YOU!
AND SO! WHAT HAVE YOU TO SHOW FOR REJECTING US? A MOUNTAIN OF CORPSES! THIS IS WHAT YOUR BANGOKU TAUGHT YOU?!
NOW, NOW, DOCTOR MORI... MAYBE THAT'S SO... BUT IT WAS HIS NANBAN MEDI-CINE...
...THAT CAUGHT HABAKI-DONO'S EYE, MM?
HIT IT ON THE NOSE!
KRAK!
BWA HAH! HAH HAH!
YOU OLD SOFTIE, DOCTOR KURE!
CAN YOU BLAME THE POOR LAD FOR CLINGING TO HIS ONLY WEAPON, EVEN WHEN HE KNOWS IT'S USELESS?
CAN'T BRING MYSELF TO CHASTISE HIM, NOT ME. MMM.

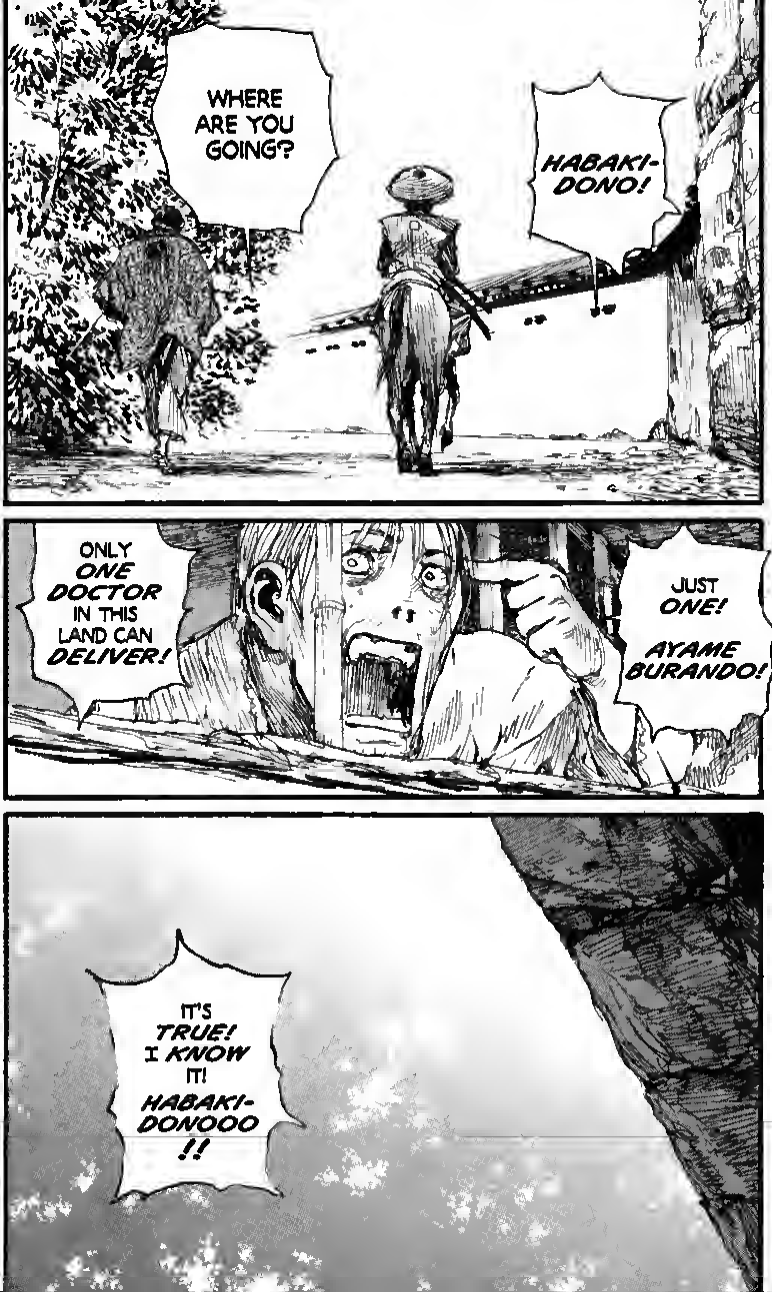
BUT HAVE YOU HEARD?
JUST WHAT HIS GORY RESEARCH IS ABOUT?
AHH... INDEED...
WHAT WAS IT...? IMMORTALITY? ETERNAL YOUTH? OR BOTH?
IT'S GOOD TO DREAM! WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, MAYBE SOME ETERNAL VIRILITY, MM?
BUWAHAHAHA! OH, DOCTOR KURE! YOU CARD!
THIS ISN'T A JOKE! IT'S REAL! REA--!!
SHUT UP, YOU MOUNTEBANK! LYING YOUR WAY TO THE TOP!
HAVEN'T YOU HEARD?
HABAKI-DONO'S SEARCHING HIGH AND LOW FOR A DOCTOR TO CLEAN UP YOUR MESS!
SOONER OR LATER, I IMAGINE HE'LL COME TO US.
BUT DON'T WORRY, I SHAN'T ANSWER. I'LL JUST OFFER SOME ADVICE.

"OPEN YOUR EYES, HABAKI-DONO!"
I'LL DRAG YOU OUT FROM BEHIND YOUR SHIELD, DOG!
THAT... THAT'S INSANE...
TO DO MY SURGERY?
SOMEONE ELSE... BESIDES ME...?
...STINKING CREATURE THROUGH THE CASTLE GATES... MY LAND...
OUR LORDS ARE TOO GENEROUS. LETTING THAT...

IS THERE ANYTHING MORE INSANE?!
THNK
I INVENTED IT, YOU KANPŌ QUACKS! YOU AREN'T UP TO IT!
SQUATTING ON YOUR ASSES! JUST STROLLING...
..ALONG THE PATH YOUR PREDECESSORS MADE?!
HAVE YOU EVER USED YOUR OWN BRAINS TO THINK OF ANYTHING?!
HAVE YOU GIVEN ONE IOTA OF THE THOUGHT TO MEDICINE THAT I HAVE?
I THINK NOT!!

HABAKI-DONO!!
I'M HERE! AYAME BURANDO!!
HABAKI-DONO! TERRIBLE NEWS!
SCOUN-DRELS ARE SPREADING RUMORS IN THE CASTLE!
SAY SOME-THING TO THOSE TWO!
PLEASE!!

HM?
SLAP THEM DOWN! RIGHT?! HABAKI-DONO!!
...IS IT ALL RIGHT, SIR?
HE'S BEEN SHOUTING...
AHH.
I'M DONE WITH HIM.
NOW, ABOUT THOSE DOCTORS. I'M COUNTING ON YOU.
YES, SIR. WHATEVER IT TAKES.
?!
HUH ?!
WHA--?! WAIT!


WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
HABAKI-DONO!
ONLY ONE DOCTOR IN THIS LAND CAN DELIVER!
JUST ONE!
AYAME BURANDO!
IT'S TRUE! I KNOW IT!
HABAKI-DONOOO!!

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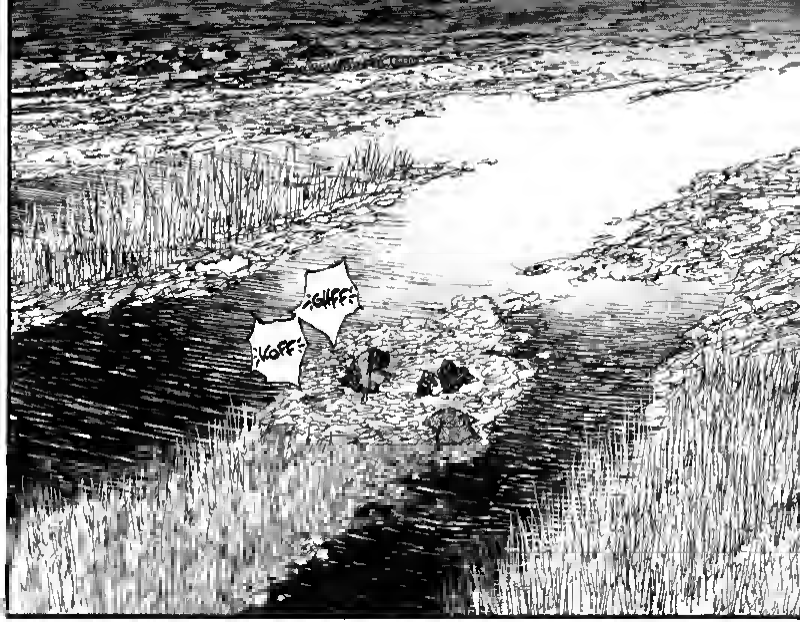
THE SPARROW NET

Part 4


GUFF
KOFF

UHNG...

"LOOK AFTER DŌA," HE SAYS...

OR MAYBE... SHE'S NEVER TRIED?
...MEANING THAT THE GIRL CAN'T EVEN SWIM?
BRRR...
...NOT GOOD.
DŌA... COME ON!
IF YOU JUST LIE THERE UNTIL THE SUN SETS, YOU'LL DO WORSE THAN CATCH COLD.
YOU HEAR ME?

.....
.....
.....
DŌA...
SHUT UP!!
ARE YOU CRY-ING?
...STOOD THERE.
IT'S YOUR FAULT... 'CAUSE YOU JUST...
...AHHN...

WHAT TO DO...
OHHH, WHAT TO DO...
NO! WHAT CAN I DO...?!
THEY'LL KILL HIM...
HOW CAN I--
STOP IT!
NOBODY'S DYING!
ISAKU...
IT'S AWFUL... SO AWFUL...

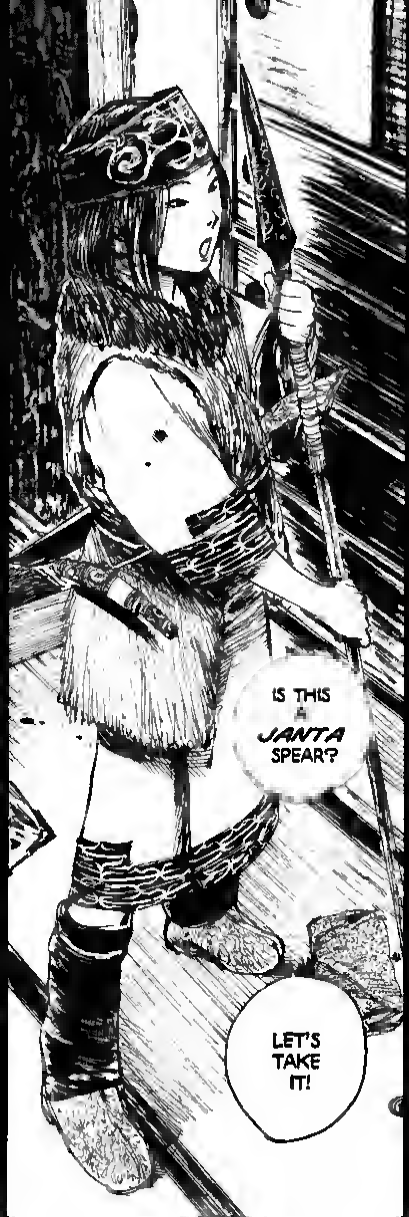
A HUGE GUY LIKE ISAKU...?
HE PROBABLY BROKE FREE!
AND EVEN IF HE'S CAUGHT...
RIGHT? REMEMBER?! THE GUY WITH THE EYEBROWS?
...THEY WOULDN'T KILL HIM! ALL THOSE COPS? YOU MURDERED THEM. NOT HIM!
HE AS GOOD AS TESTIFIED TO THAT.
.....
.....
.....
DŌA!
LET'S GO HOME. WE'LL FIND A WAY TO SAVE HIM.
I'LL HELP OUT ANY WAY I CAN!

I'VE NEVER SEEN A MAN LIKE THAT...
ALL THAT STRENGTH. EVEN WHEN SURROUNDED...
...HE JUST SHIELDED US. HELPED US ESCAPE.
...JUST ABANDONING A MAN LIKE THAT...
NOT MY FIGHT. I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS. BUT...
...ISN'T RIGHT...
I NEED YOUR SKILLS. NOW!
SNAP OUT OF IT!
DŌA!
ISAKU... ISAKU...

I ABSOLUTELY *WILL NOT* ABANDON YOU!
AND THE *AUTHORITIES* CAN'T *EXECUTE* HIM, NOT FOR TOSSING PEOPLE *AROUND*...
YOU DON'T GET IT...
YOU, YOU... DON'T GET *ANYTHING!*
THEY'LL DO TERRIBLE THINGS...
WORSE THAN IF THEY CAUGHT *ME*...
ISAKU'S A *KIRISHITAN* !!
THE SON OF A *BATEREN*... WHEN THEY SEARCH HIM, THEY'LL FIND HIS *KURUSU!*

IF THEY FIND IT, THEY'LL NEVER FREE HIM.
THEY'LL TORTURE HIM FOR SURE...!
HHYUUUUUUUU

yuuuuuu KTAKKTAK
KTAK KTAK KTAKKTAK KTAK


IS THIS A JANTA SPEAR?
LET'S TAKE IT!

.....
.....
.....

ISAKU!!

CHANGE INTO THIS.
YOU'LL STAND OUT WHERE WE'RE GOING.

KU... KUI-CHIRU.
IS *THIS* YOUR... *"JOUR-NEY"...?*
I'M JUST TAKING IT BACK FOR THE *UTARI.*
WE WON'T DO IT AGAIN.
BUT THESE *BASHO UKEOININ* TRICK US. THEY'VE STOLEN *ALL KINDS* OF THINGS FROM US.
NOT *KUICHIRU! TOWA!*
I *TOLD* YOU TO CALL ME *TOWA!*
NOW HURRY *UP!* THEY'LL FIND US!
BUT YOU'RE NOT *AINU,* KUICHIRU.

LET'S CROSS THE SEA!
I WANT TO GO SOMEPLACE WHERE NOBODY KNOWS ME!

CLINING...
THAIR THEY GO!
THET WAY!
TOWA! STUPID!
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!
STEALING WAS BAD ENOUGH! BUT KILLING?!
MAYBE YOU HAD TO BEFORE... BUT TODAY?
BUT, BUT...
..I WAS SO HUNGRY. COULDN'T BEAR IT.
THAT JERKY, JUST HANGING THERE.
AND WHEN I REACHED, HE POINTED A GUN AT ME...

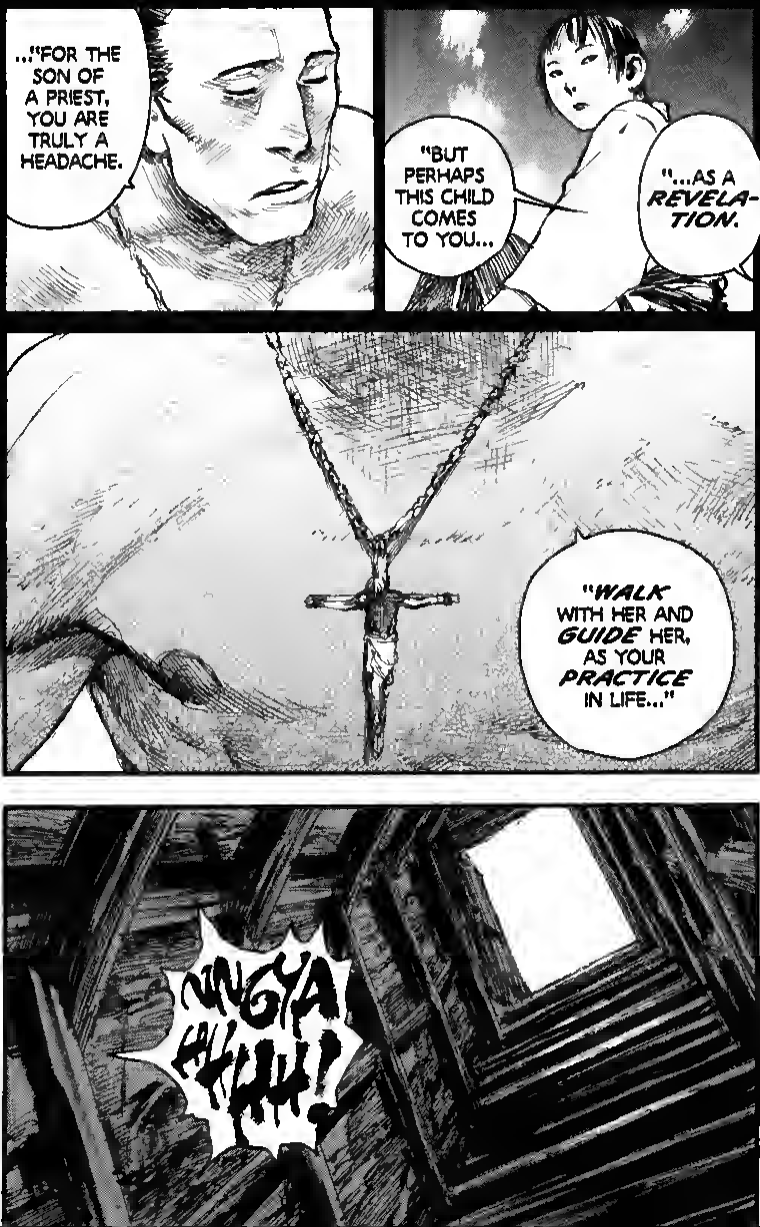
I...
I WAS SO, SO HUNGRY...
I COULDN'T THINK STRAIGHT. IT ALL WENT BLACK...
.....
.....
.....

I KILLED FOUR MEN...
.....
.....
.....
THERE WASN'T A CHOICE.
SHISAMU WON'T SHARE WITH STRANGERS.
AND IF WE STEAL...
...THEY DO THIS.
THERE WASN'T ALWAYS FOOD IN THE KOTAN.
BUT IF YOU RESPECTED THE WAY THE GODS OF THE HILLS AND RIVERS GAVE FREELY.
HERE, THINGS... EVERY-THING...
...BE-LONGS TO SOMEBODY- TO HUMANS.
I NEVER DREAM-ED...
WE HAVE TO STEAL.
IF WE DON'T STEAL, WE DIE.

U...
...JUST... A CHILD...!
THUD!
IF YOU GAVE US THE CASH I WOULDN'T HAVE HURT YOU...

TOWA.
HM?
IF... IF WE GO WAY SOUTH...
...THERE HAVE TO BE MOUNTAINS THAT NO ONE OWNS.
LET'S BUILD A HOUSE IN THE FOOTHILLS.
PLANT POTATOES AND LIVE THERE.
MM...
MM... POTATOES.
SOUNDS... INTEREST-ING.

ISAKU.
DON'T ABANDON ME...
BEFORE WE LEFT...
...MY FATHER TOLD ME...
I... I'D NEVER!
DON'T DISAPPEAR.

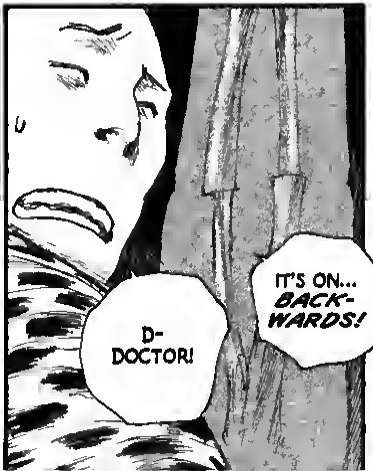

..."FOR THE SON OF A PRIEST, YOU ARE TRULY A HEADACHE.
"BUT PERHAPS THIS CHILD COMES TO YOU...
"...AS A REVELATION.
"WALK WITH HER AND GUIDE HER, AS YOUR PRACTICE IN LIFE..."
NNGYA HHHH!

OWNGH! GAUUD !!
IT HURTS, YOU DAMN QUACK!
IT FRIGGIN' HURRRTS !!
IT'S ALL RIGHT. ALL FINE...!
THEY SAID YOU WERE A SUTURING MASTER...
UP-- UP TO SEVEN STITCHES, YES...
GUUU...
.....
.....

UHH HHH
IT HURTS! AHNNG!
GOOD... WE'LL TAKE HIM FROM HERE.
BETTER?
AGAIN IN THREE DAYS. PREPARE!

HHNG!

...!

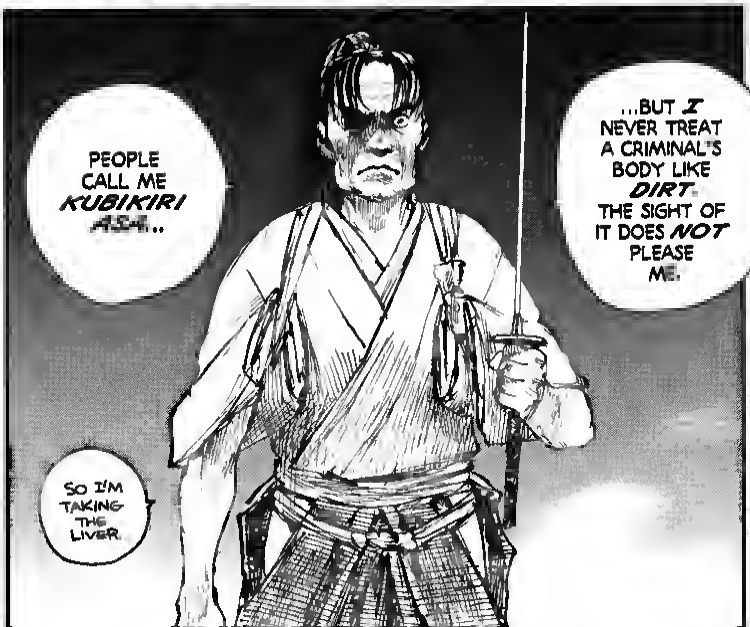

IT'S ON... BACK-WARDS!
D-DOCTOR!

WHAT?!
S-SIR...!
OH, DEAR. HOW TRUE.
WHADDAYA MEAN, "HOW TRUE"?!
YOU DODDERING FOOL!! REATTACH IT!
BUT SIR...!
IF WE TAKE ANY LONGER, MANJI'S ARM MIGHT--
URRUNGG!!
ENOUGH! CANCELLED!
RESTORE THEIR ARMS!
WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?!
AIIEE!!! RIGHT NOW?! THAT'S...

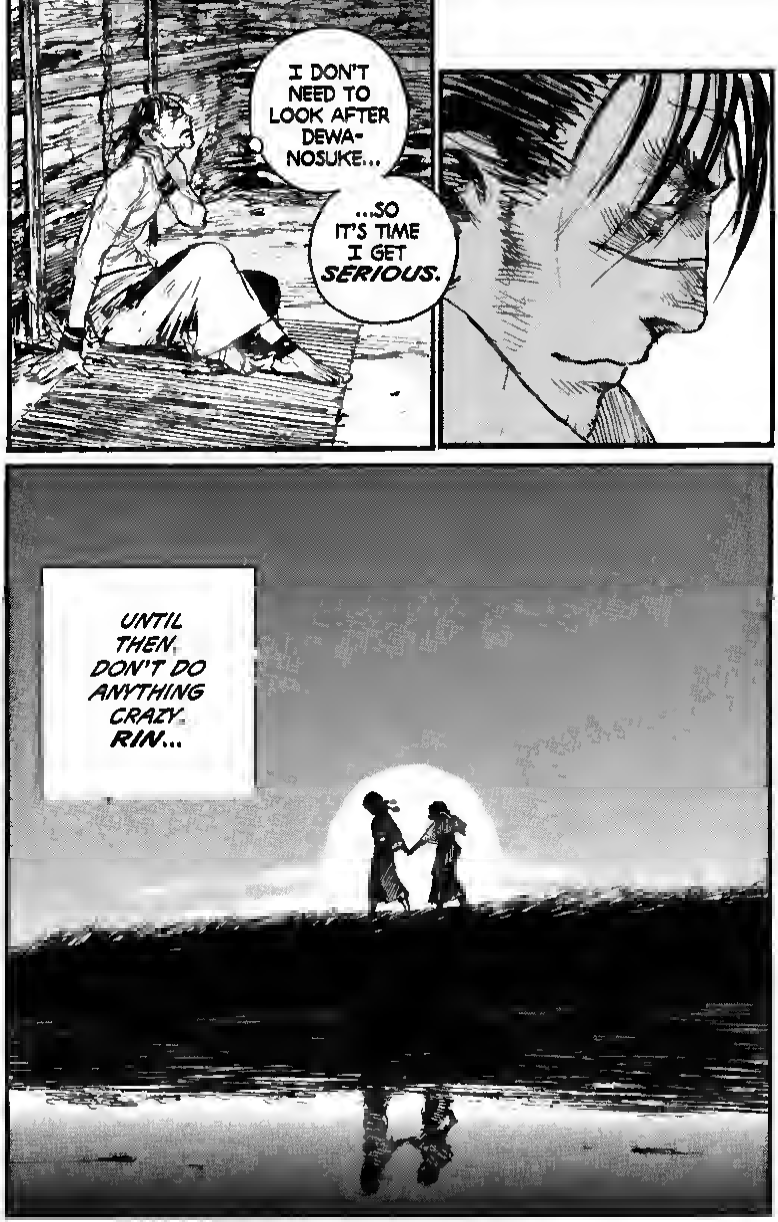
.....
.....
.....
GWEUH...
GUHH!
WHAT ABOUT MY ARM?!
FINE, FINE. IT'LL STICK SOON.
RIGHT? TORA-EMON?
THIS IS GONNA STICK ?!
P-PARDON?! UH, ACTUAL-LY--
YOU IDIOT!!
DO SOME-THING!!
BUT, BUT SIR--

GHK!!
.....
.....
.....

HEEEK!
HIS HEAD! GET HIS HEAD!
YOUNG HABAKI!
THIS WHOLE SCENE HAS BECOME...
...A FARCE!


PEOPLE CALL ME KUBIKIRI ASA...
SO I'M TAKING THE LIVER.
...BUT I NEVER TREAT A CRIMINAL'S BODY LIKE DIRT. THE SIGHT OF IT DOES NOT PLEASE ME.

UHFF!
THEY SCREW UP UNTIL THEY QUIT...
...OR BY SOME FREAK CHANCE IT *WORKS*.
ONE WAY OR THE OTHER, THOUGHT I'D *WALK*.
BUT THAT'S IT... NO MORE OF *THIS*.


I DON'T NEED TO LOOK AFTER DEWA-NOSUKE...
...SO IT'S TIME I GET SERIOUS.
UNTIL THEN, DON'T DO ANYTHING CRAZY, RIN...

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BAREFOOT
Part 1

RIN, DEAR. LITTLE *RIN*. WE DROPPED BY KAGIMURA'S PLACE...
...AND GOT MANJI BACK.
HYAKURIN! GIICHI!
IS IT *TRUE*?! THANK YOU SO *MUCH*!
WELL... ACTUALLY, SEEMS LIKE THEY USED BITS OF HIM FOR ALL KINDS OF THINGS.
FACT IS...
...THEY SAID THERE WASN'T...
...MUCH *LEFT*.

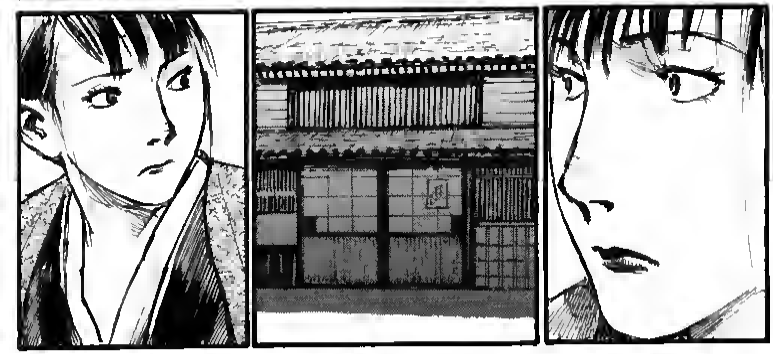
EH?
LEFT? WHAT DO YOU MEAN...?
BUT, HEY, WE DECIDED TO TAKE WHAT THEY HAD.
THE MAN'S IMMORTAL, SO THIS SHOULD DO.
HERE.

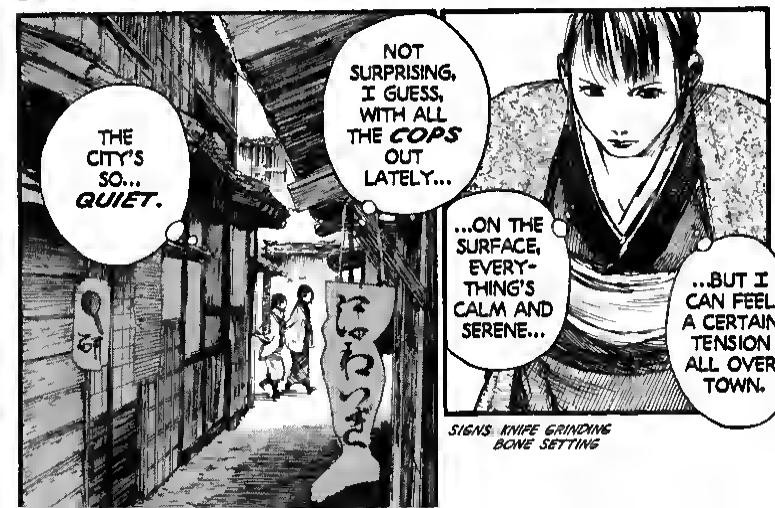
:huh:
:ahh:
:hahh:
:haaah:
:haaah:
DIDN'T HAPPEN, WON'T HAPPEN... RIGHT?!

D...
D...
DŌA?!
NGN...
MNG...
.....
.....
.....
WHAM!
THWP
THWP
...WHAT
A
SHOCK!

I'M THINKING ABOUT CHECKING OUT THE PRISON IN KODENMA-CHŌ.
DŌA.
WHEN THEY BRING FOLKS IN...
...FIRST THEY QUESTION THEM AT THE ŌBAN-YA...
...BUT IF THAT DOESN'T CLEAR THEM, THEY SEND THEM TO PRISON.

I DON'T KNOW WHERE ISAKU-SAN IS NOW. BUT WE DO KNOW...
...THEY'LL DRAG HIM TO KODENMA-CHŌ SOON.
AND, BY THE WAY...
...WE ARE NOT GOING THERE TO KILL.




THE CITY'S SO... QUIET.
NOT SURPRISING, I GUESS, WITH ALL THE COPS OUT LATELY...
...ON THE SURFACE, EVERY-THING'S CALM AND SERENE...
...BUT I CAN FEEL A CERTAIN TENSION ALL OVER TOWN.
SIGNS: KNIFE GRINDING
BONE SETTING

WHAT'S *THAT?!*
MY SECRET WEAPON. A *TŌMI-ZUTSU.*
I BORROW-ED IT FROM A PAINTER FRIEND.

GIMME! GIMME!
MONEY CAN'T BUY SOME-THING LIKE THIS!
OKAY, BUT WAIT A-- HEY!! BE GENTLE WITH IT!
THAT'S RIGHT. FOCUS ON THE GATE.
IF THEY BRING ISAKU, NOTE WHICH BLOCK HE'S IN.
WOW!!
EVEN IF HE'S KIRISHITAN, THEY WON'T TORTURE HIM RIGHT AWAY.
WE'LL FIGURE OUT HOW TO SPRING HIM THE VERY SAME DAY.
IT'LL ALL WORK OUT. AS LONG AS...
...YOU STAY CARE-FUL.

FOUR DAYS LATER...
I'M BORED... MEANING...
...THEY HAVEN'T BROUGHT ISAKU!
NO POINT SHOUTING AT ME...
...BUT... YOU'RE RIGHT. IT'S STRANGE.

THEY HAVEN'T HAULED IN ANY-BODY...
...FOR FOUR DAYS STRAIGHT. GUESS THAT'S A GOOD THING, BUT...
.....
.....
THEN WHERE'S ISAKU?

...RIN. I NEED TO GO...
...SOME WHERE.

I'M GOING TO ASK THIS GEEZER I KNOW.
OH. OKAY.
SO... SHE DOES HAVE FRIENDS...?

I'VE GOT A FEELING I'LL NEVER FIND ISAKU IF I STICK WITH YOU.
THIS NEVER WOULD'VE HAPPENED IF YOU HADN'T GONE ALL CRAZY!
WELL-- THANKS A HEAP!
...hmph!
THAP THAP THAP
JUST DO AS YOU PLEASE!
I'VE GOT A MOUNTAIN OF STUFF TO DO!
IT'S NOT THAT I'M NARROW-MINDED, HEAVEN'S NO!
A MAN OF MY AGE, I'M MORE THAN WILLING!

SOME YOUNG MAN SHOWS TALENT, GROWTH POTENTIAL...
...I GLADLY LET HIM TAKE CREDIT, I DO.
...KNOCKING ON MY DOOR.
HMM, I'M AN HERBALIST. DON'T GET MANY YOUNG TURKS...
RIGHT, DOCTOR? SURELY YOU'VE BEEN THERE YOURSELF?
I ALMOST ENVY YOUR PANIC, YOU GOTEN-I, REALLY.
P-PANIC?! NOW, DOCTOR!
IT'S NOT THAT! I'M SAYING, JUST TALENT ALONE...?
AH! YES, THE LAD NEEDS EXPERIENCE, MM?
YES! YES! THAT'S IT EXACTLY!!

HE'S BACK FROM TAISEI? SO WHAT?!
WHAT'D THE LITTLE SQUIRT LEARN IN TAISEI?!
CHOPPING UP CORPSES, STICKING 'EM TOGETHER ANY WHICH WAY, NOT EVEN A PRAYER?! IT'S PERVERTED!
WHAT THE HELL'S THAT?! IS THAT MEDICINE?!
THEN WHAT HAVE WE BEEN DOING, EH?!
SHUT THE FUCK UP
IMBIBING, IT SEEMS, MORI-SENSEI.
YET, IMMORTALITY...? TO HAVE SUCH FANTASY THRUST UPON HIM... AND STILL CHARGE AHEAD? I RESPECT HIS PURITY, I DO.
IMMORTALITY?
IS THIS A FAD...? SOME YOUNG MEN I KNOW SAY THEY MET AN IMMORTAL AND CROSSED SWORDS WITH HIM.
OH HOH?!
MIZUSHINA-SENSEI, YOU BELIEVE SUCH FAIRY TALES?
IMMORTALITY. HMM...
IF SUCH A THING DOES EXIST...

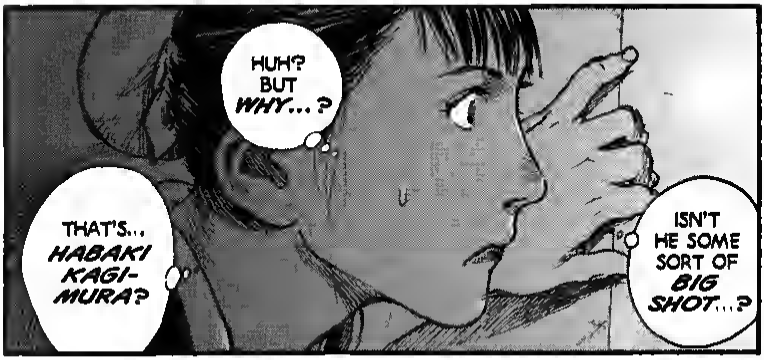
...IT ISN'T MEDICINE. IT'S *SORCERY*.

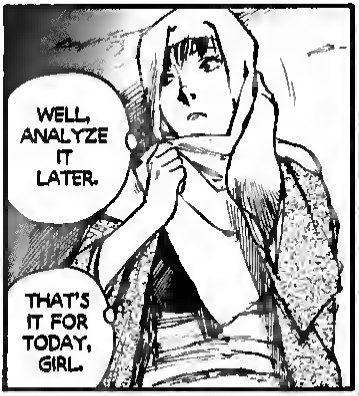
KASHIN KOJI'S GONE?

NOT *DRINK-ING* AGAIN...?

SHAK

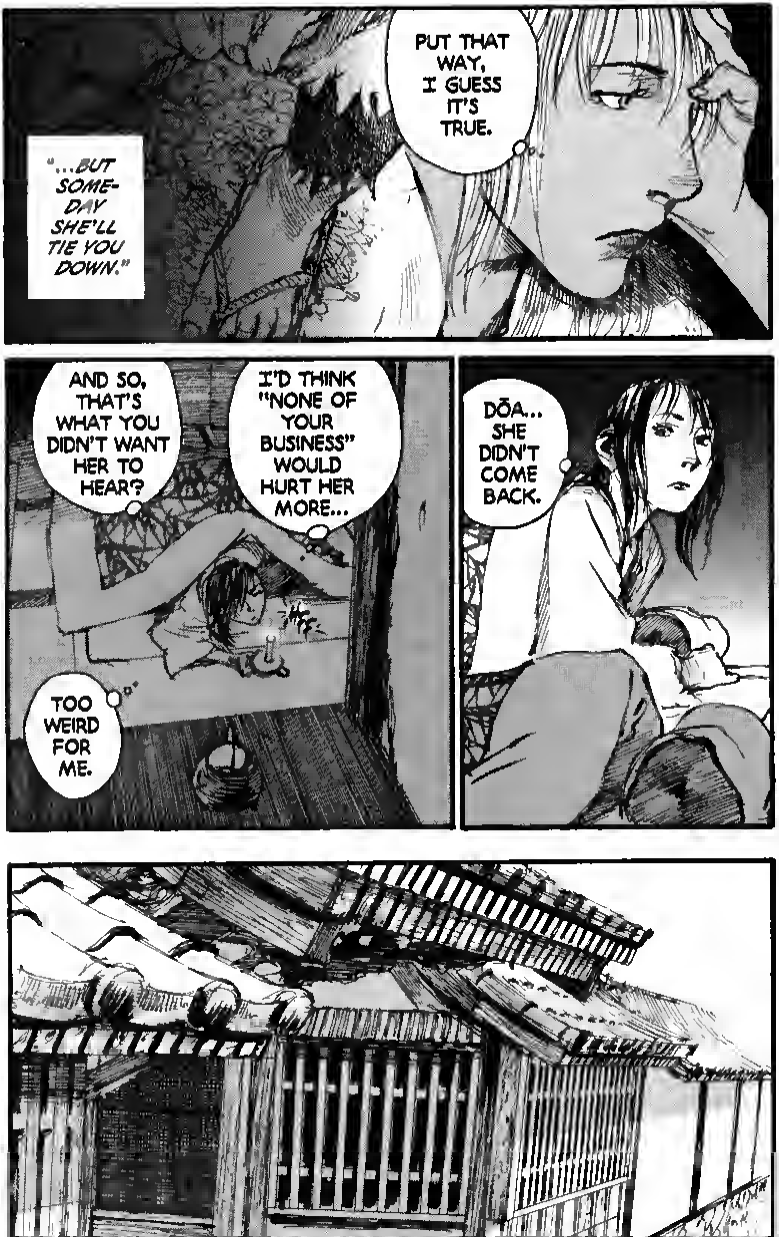
ALL BUT LOW-LEVEL SAMURAI WERE EXPECTED TO HAVE A SPEAR AND AT LEAST ONE RETAINER WITH THEM WHEN THEY REPORTED TO EDO CASTLE.





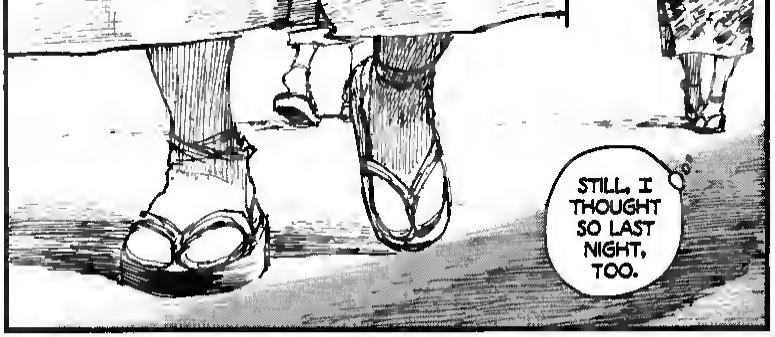
...ALL I CAN SAY FOR SURE IS... HABAKI DIDN'T PLAN TO KILL MANJI.
IF HE'D WANTED THAT, HE WOULD HAVE TOLD ME TO DO IT.
!
AND THEN, I THINK IT'S CERTAIN, TOO...
...THAT MANJI'S NO LONGER IN KAGIMURA'S COMPOUND.
HIDE MANJI FROM THEM...? NOT EASY. ESPECIALLY FOR THIS LONG.
HABAKI HAS A WIFE AND CHILD.
WHAT IF HE GOT LOOSE WHEN HABAKI WAS AT THE CASTLE? HE'D BE RISKING HIS FAMILY.
WITH THE MUGAI-RYŪ GONE, HABAKI'S DUTIES ARE THE SAME AS ANY OTHER BANSHI.
IF THERE'S NO CRISIS, GO TO THE CASTLE ON TIME. LEAVE ON TIME.
IF THERE'S A DAY HE DOESN'T...

...THEN ON THAT DAY, HE'S WITH MANJI.
THAT'S AS FAR AS I CAN FIGURE IT.
.....
.....
.....
...ONE MORE THING.
FROM NOW ON...
...YOU SHOULD WORK ON YOUR OWN. DON'T ASK HYAKURIN.
WHATEVER ELSE, HABAKI DOESN'T RECOGNIZE YOU.
THAT'S YOUR ONLY STRENGTH.
HYAKURIN MAY FEEL LIKE A SOURCE OF STRENGTH...


"...BUT SOME-DAY SHE'LL TIE YOU DOWN."
PUT THAT WAY, I GUESS IT'S TRUE.
AND SO, THAT'S WHAT YOU DIDN'T WANT HER TO HEAR?
I'D THINK "NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS" WOULD HURT HER MORE...
TOO WEIRD FOR ME.
DŌA... SHE DIDN'T COME BACK.

HM?
KENTARŌ. WHAT DO YOU TELL FATHER?
THE BOY STARTS SCHOOL TODAY...
HOH! HE DOES?
I'M SORRY, KEN-TARŌ.
IF YOUR FATHER HAD MORE TIME...
A BUSY FATHER MAKES KENTARŌ PROUD.
HMF...

SO THAT'S HABAKI'S WIFE...
...AND SON.
MY, MY... HE'S YOUNG.
A LATE MARRIAGE, I SEE.
SO WHO DO I THINK I AM? A NINJA?
WELL, IT'S TRUE. IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE HE'S...
...HIDING SOME-ONE.
.....
.....
...HEH. HE SEEMS LIKE A GOOD FATHER.
...BUT SHE WON'T GET SENTI-MENTAL.
NOT THIS RIN-SAN.


STILL, I THOUGHT SO LAST NIGHT, TOO.

WHY DOES HE WALK AROUND LOOKING LIKE HE BIT INTO A STINK BUG?
HE SEEMED RELAXED AT HOME.

HABAKI-
DONO!
A MINUTE!
?
WHAT
?!

YOU GAVE HIM INK...?
NO, SIR. IT'S PROBABLY SOY SAUCE FROM HIS MEALS.
OH!

.....
.....
SO... IT WAS LIKE HUNTING DUCKS...
HEH.
DUCKS, SIR?
HEH HEH HEH...
THE MEAT TASTES SWEETEST WHEN THE MAGGOTS COME OUT.

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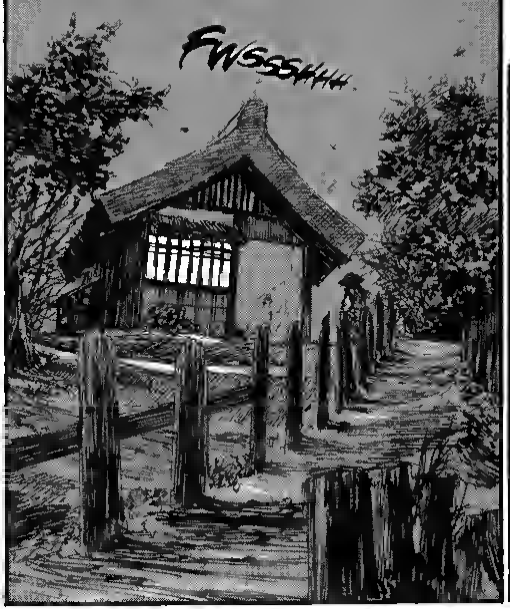
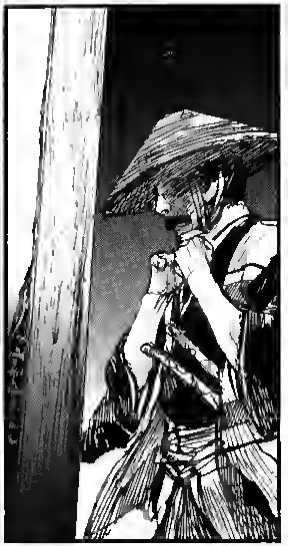
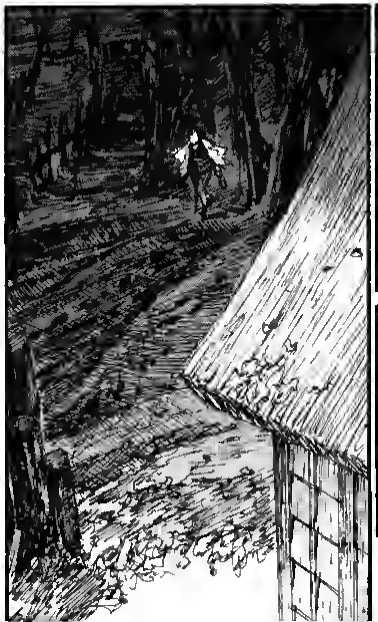
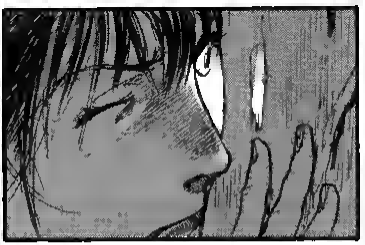
BAREFOOT
Part 2

AWOOO
FIVE DAYS TAILING HABAKI KAGI-MURA...
...AND FOR THE FIRST TIME...
...THE *VERY* FIRST TIME...
A DESOLATE PLACE LIKE *THIS*...?
...HE'S *NOT* GOING HOME.
AT LAST, AT LAST, AT *LAST!*
I'VE *SNIFFED* YOU OUT!


FWSSSHHH







A... WOMAN?
JUST ONE...
...NO... NO, TWO...
...TALK-ING ABOUT... WHAT?
.....
.....
.....
.....
DARN WIND. CAN'T MAKE IT OUT...
AH?
BAD--!!
KCHAK
SLASH

FWSSSHH!
WHAT'S WRONG?
MM...? NO-THING.
GIMME A BREAK!
A MIS-TRESS...?

GIVE ME A BREAK !!
SNAPP!
READ THIS?! THIS WORTH-LESS CRAP?!
D-DOCTOR.
CALM YOUR-SELF.
TORA-EMON...
...WAS IT?
.....
.....
.....
PHEW
OKAY. FINE...
...I SAW FOR MYSELF.

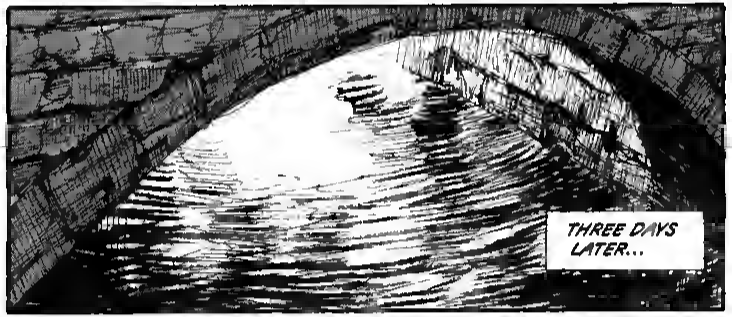
HIS BODY'S NOT NORMAL. IMMORTAL? I CAN'T SAY... BUT... NOT NORMAL.
I'LL GIVE YOU THAT.
BUT WHAT ABOUT IT?!
MŌZEN! AYAME BURANDO! FOUR HŌGAN AND HŌIN!
WHAT THE HELL CAN I DO?!
THUD
THEY ALL FAILED!
YES, BUT WE THINK YOU--
DON'T YOU MESS WITH ME! IT'S A PLOT!
HE'S PURGING ANY DOCTOR HE DOESN'T LIKE! PROMOTING HIS PAWNS!

THIS "SURGERY"...?
IN-SANE! FROM DAY ONE!
I'M OUTTA HERE!
EH...?!
WA!--!
SENSEI, WAIT!
AT LEAST UNTIL HABAKI-DONO--!
STUFF IT!
I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS CRAP! WHEN HABAKI-DONO GETS HERE, YOU TELL HIM THAT.
I DON'T CARE! GOOD RID-DANCE!
ERP?
HA-HABAKI...!

BURANDO-DONO?
EH? HIM?
!
...YO...
...TORA-EMON... BEEN AGES.

THEY PARDONED YOU! THANK GOD!
YES, YES...
BURANDO-DONO! IT IS YOU!
IT'S BEEN SO AWFUL SINCE YOU LEFT!
....
....
THE DOCTORS THEY BROUGHT IN!
CHARLATANS! ALL OF THEM!
NO TECHNIQUE, NOTHING.
YES?
YOU'RE EXCUSED.
.....
.....
.....

OH, SIR! LET'S GIVE IT OUR BEST!
BURANDO-DONO!


THREE DAYS LATER...

AARGH...

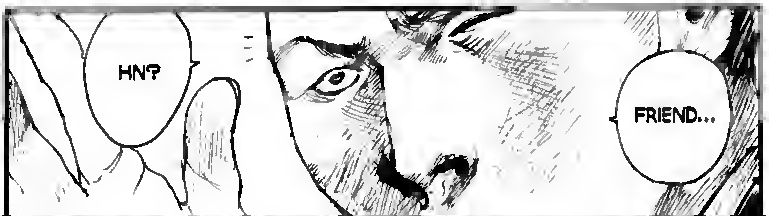
phewww...

TOO MUCH FREE TIME. SEVEN DAYS UP HERE.
IT'S KILL-ING ME...

CAN'T BELIEVE THAT PIT WAS THE SAME CASTLE...
HN?

OHH! IS THAT TORA-EMON?!
SO! YOU FINALLY GOT THE CHOP?

HAH HAH HAH! JOKING! JUST JOKING!
IT'S JUST BREAK TIME, RIGHT?


HN?
FRIEND...

...WHAT'S WRONG? YOU LOOK AWFUL?
OH, KARU-KOZAWA-SAN. EH? AWFUL?
...DO I?
WELL, UH... NOT SURPRIS-ING!
ALL THOSE QUACKS...? SICKENS THE HEART MORE'N THE BODY.
AND SO? WHAT KIND OF DOC IS IT NOW...?
ACTUAL-LY, IT'S...
WHAT?!
BURANDO-DONO'S BACK?!

I SEE, I SEE! THAT'S GREAT!
THUD!
GREAT?
KAGIMURA-DONO SPOKE HARSHLY...BUT HE'S THE BEST, ANY WAY YOU CUT IT!
EVEN A LAYMAN LIKE ME COULD SEE HE HAD THE SUREST HANDS.
AND NATURALLY, THE OTHER SAWBONES FRETTED ABOUT THEIR STATUS...
...WHILE HE HAD NOTHING TO LOSE.
MAYBE THAT LIGHT-NESS OF BEING...
...WAS THE SOURCE OF HIS BOLD-NESS?
TRUE, AT THE START, HE WAS TOO BOLD...
...EVEN CRUEL...
...BUT REMEMBER HIS PARTING WORDS?

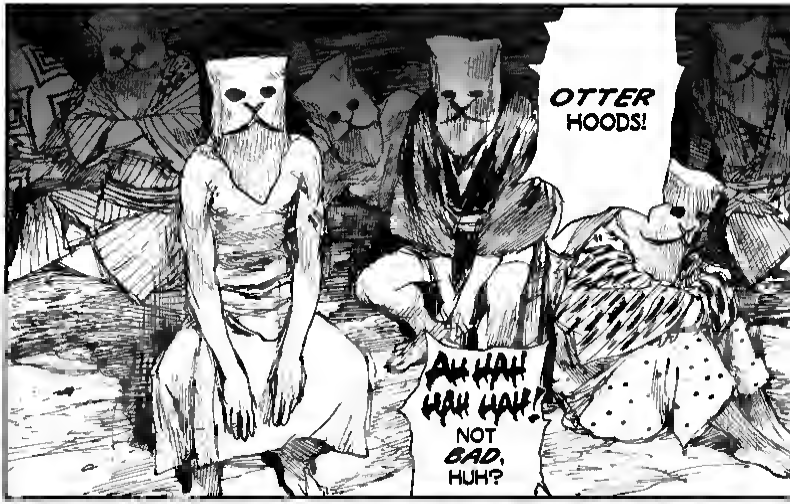
"PEOPLE ARE NOT OTTERS!"
AH, THOSE WORDS. STRUCK ME TO THE HEART!
I THOUGHT, HERE'S A DOCTOR WHO VALUES LIFE...
HN?
OT-OT-OTTERS...
-HRGK--HRGK-
TORA-EMON. YOU OKAY?
WHOA!
UEEK!!

K-KARU-KOZAWA-SAN...
THE... MAN YOU REMIND ME OF...
...AND THE MAN... DOWN THERE...
...TRULY... THEY'RE DIFFERENT PEOPLE!
I DON'T UNDERSTAND... W-WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM...?!
HE... THAT MAN... HAS CHANGED...
THAT'S IT FOR TODAY.

FOUR...
...DEAD!!
TELL HABAKI-DONO I WANT MORE...
SECONDS, ANYBODY?!

WHAT'S WRONG, TORA-EMON?
GRRRR!
HAFF!
FOR SHAME. HAVE TO GET USED TO IT. OR... IS THAT IT?
CAN'T STAND THE SMELL?
.....
.....
.....
TUT. HAVE TO BOTHER HABAKI AGAIN.
...HUMAN?
TO YOUR EYES THEY STILL LOOK...

TWO DAYS LATER...
TORAEMON! BEHOLD!


OTTER HOODS!
AH HAH HAH HAH!
NOT BAD, HUH?

IF YOU CAN'T TELL 'EM APART, WHO CARES IF THEY LIVE OR DIE...

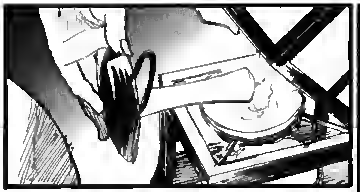
YOU'LL BE FINE NOW? RIGHT?
WELL, ISN'T IT BRACING TO HAVE OUR BOY BURANDO BACK...
.....
.....
...HUH? YOUNG HABAKI?
PERKS ME UP JUST WATCHING HIM!
.....
.....
BRAC- ING, HMM...?

GRAH!!
TORA-EMON!
MANJI'S LEG!

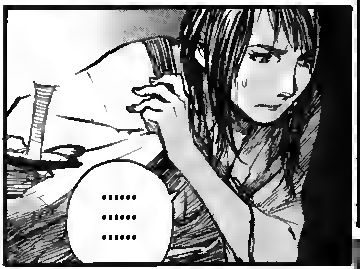
TEN DAYS TODAY.
...EATING OR DINING WITH COLLEAGUES... ZERO.
VISITING HIS MISTRESS... ONCE.
AND AS FOR HABAKI...
NO CAN DO...
AND THAT SHABBY WHORE-HOUSE...?
HIDE A BIG DUDE THERE FOR MONTHS?

I DON'T GET IT!!
I JUST DON'T! FOR THE LIFE OF ME!
Shhhhhh!
FWOOD
TAILING AND TAILING HIM! FOR WHAT?!
... LATE NIGHT. EARLY EVENING. DIFFERENT TIMES...
ALL I KNOW IS, HABAKI GETS HOME...
.....
.....
.....
...COULD IT BE...
HE'S MEETING MANJI IN...?

KTAK THUNK THAM



DŌA...?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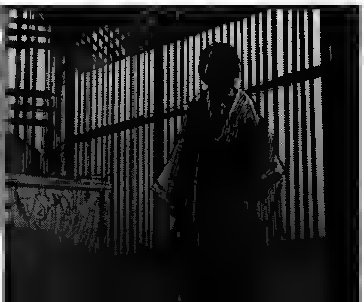
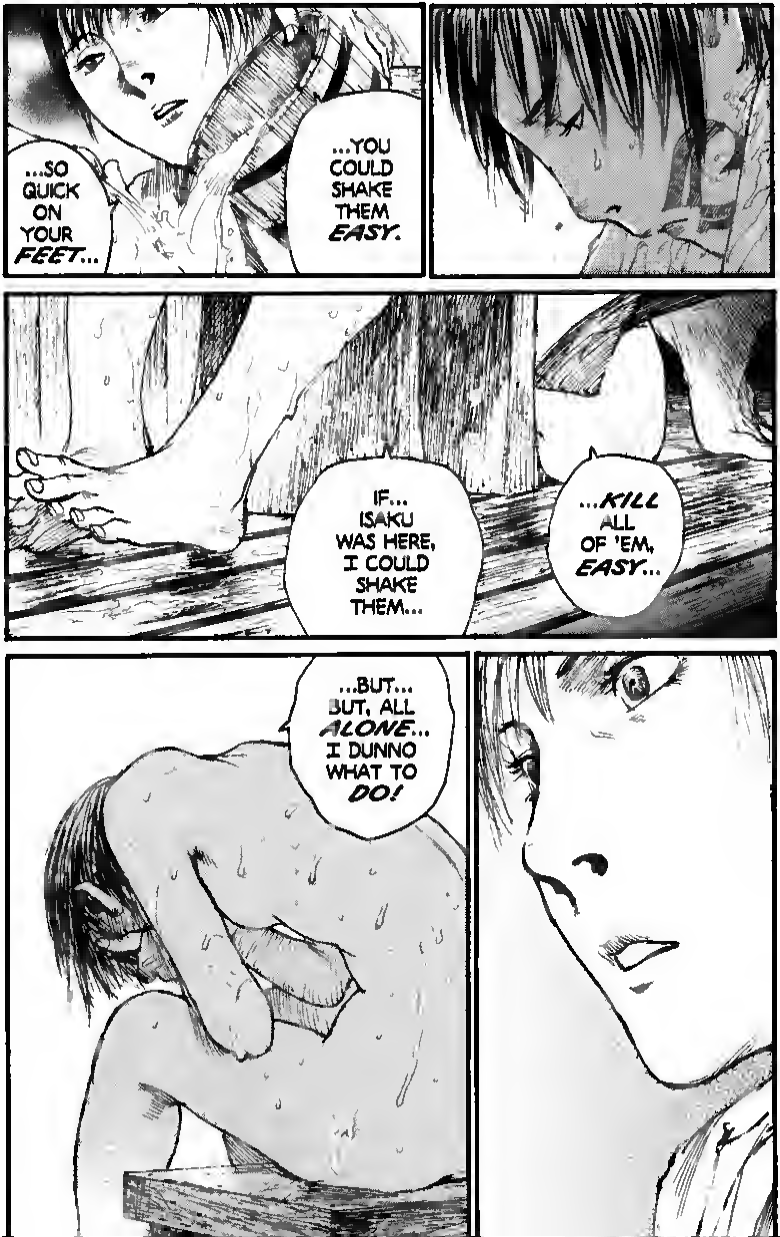


...DŌA.
THERE, THERE...
...WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? YOU'RE FILTHY.
:sniff:

...YOUR OLD MAN?
I SEE... SO YOU NEVER SAW...
...THOSE COPS AGAIN. I GOT AWAY, BUT...
AND THEN... THEN COMING BACK...
SLAM
...MORE OF 'EM, AROUND HERE...
YOU'RE SO TINY, DŌA...
.....
.....
.....
TEN DAYS?! IN THIS WEA-THER?!
AND THAT'S WHY YOU STAYED AWAY?


...SO QUICK ON YOUR FEET...
...YOU COULD SHAKE THEM EASY.
IF... ISAKU WAS HERE, I COULD SHAKE THEM...
...KILL ALL OF 'EM, EASY...
...BUT... BUT, ALL ALONE... I DUNNO WHAT TO DO!

ISAKU...
...WHERE HAVE YOU GONE?!
...ISAKU...
TOO STRONG? TOO WEAK...?
YOU MYS-TERIOUS CHILD...

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BAREFOOT
Part 3

THIS ONE'S HOPE-LESS.

RIN. LET ME LOOK NEXT TIME.
C'MON! PLEASE? LET ME.
BE QUIET!
BORRR-ING...
THIS ONE, TOO.

IS HE REAL-LY IN THERE?

PGH!

STOP IGNOR-ING ME !!

hhf-
hhf-

...RIN?

WHY, YOU--
!?
YOU HAVING YOUR PERIOD?
YOU'RE ALL WEIRD.
EVER SINCE WE LEFT KOJI'S.
I'M RIN ASANO. I LIVE OVER NEAR SHITAYA...
HOH HOH?!
.....
.....
SORRY.
RIN, ARE YOU? EVEN PRETTIER THAN YOUR NAME.

SHE'S PUTTING ME UP.
I SEE. I SEE. DON'T FORGET TO THANK HER.
OH, IT'S NOTHING...
DŌA. IS THAT O-SHIRO!?
HN? YEAH...
HARDLY RECOGNIZE YOU IN THAT.
REALLY? YOU LIKE?
NOW YOU BE CAREFUL GOING HOME.
WAIT!
BUT EVERYONE SAYS KASHIN KOJI'S TIGHT WITH OFFICIALS...
I SAID-- DON'T CALL ME THAT.
OFFICIALS? JUST DOCTORS! TENI!
THE SHOGUN'S RHEUMATISM... SOME BUREAUCRAT'S HEMORRHOIDS... THAT'S ALL I HEAR ABOUT.
YOU NITWIT! WHAT ELSE CAN I SAY?!
HOW SHOULD I KNOW WHERE ISAKU IS?!

P-PARDON ME! DON'T THE GOTEN-I KNOW OTHER THINGS...
...ABOUT THE CASTLE?
I MEAN, ONE OF MY FRIENDS IS MISSING, TOO...
HNN?
...AND THINKING ABOUT IT, IT'S POSSI-BLE...
...HE'S BEING HELD IN THERE...
WOW! THEN MAYBE ISAKU'S THERE TOO!
HE IS! I'M SURE OF IT!
STOP YOUR BLATHER-ING!
JUST FORGET IT!
I KNOW NOTHING. EVEN IF SOME TENI DID KNOW, HE'D NEVER TELL A TOWN DOC.
WELL, FINE!
WE'LL SNEAK IN AND SEE, RIGHT?!
EH? UHM, SNEAK IN...?
DŌA!!
HAVE YOU ANY IDEA WHAT YOU'RE SAYING?

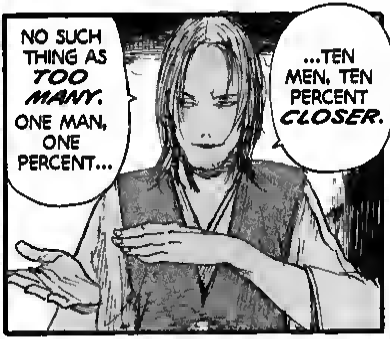
RILE THE SHOGUN-ATE NOW...
...IT HURTS YOUR PRECIOUS BOSS...
!
IT'S THE SAME WITH MY PROJECT.
THIS IS MY WINDOW. TALKING DOCTOR TO DOCTOR. IF WE STIR THINGS UP AND PUT THEM ON GUARD...
...EVERY-THING'S LOST.
AS FOR ISAKU...
DON'T LOOK AT ME LIKE THAT!

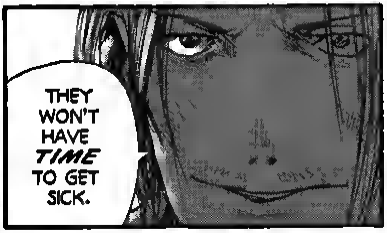
...REALLY?
OF COURSE! NO ONE'S SAYING ABANDON HIM!
...I'LL WORK IT... USE SOME CONNECTIONS.
BUT THE TRUTH IS, IT'S A BAD TIME TO POKE AROUND.
THEY'RE ROUNDING UP OMOTE ISHI AND OKU ISHI FOR SOME FOOL "IMMORTALITY" EXPERIMENT.
ONLY THE DROP-OUTS HAVE TIME FOR ME.
AN EXPERIMENT?
IN IMMORTALITY?!

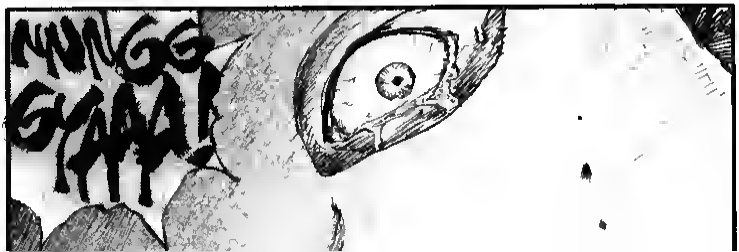
H-HABAKI-DONO...
...THIS IS SOME SERIOUS OVER-CROWDING...

I WAS SUMMONED BY WAKA-DOSHIYORI SYMPATHETIC TO THE EXPERIMENT...
...THEY SAID THE PAPER-WORK FOR ALL THESE PRISONER TRANSFERS IS ONEROUS AND THE PRISON BUGYŌ'S REPUTATION IS AT RISK...
..BUT THEY'LL TURN A BLIND EYE IF I PLACE THE FELONS UNDER MY JURISDIC-TION.
WE CAN'T HAVE THAT ON THE SHOGUN'S DOORSTEP.
DAMN!
FREE ME!
LET US OUT!
SPARE MEEE!
...WE CAN'T HANDLE THE FOOD OR THE WASTE.
WHAT IF THERE'S AN EPI-DEMIC?
BUT... BUT, SIR...
HAVE NO FEAR, HABAKI-DONO.

BURAN-
DO...


NO SUCH THING AS TOO MANY. ONE MAN, ONE PERCENT...
...TEN MEN. TEN PERCENT CLOSER.


THEY WON'T HAVE TIME TO GET SICK.

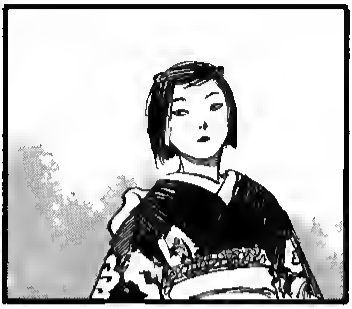

NNNGG GAAAA!

NOOO!!
HOLD HIM LIKE THAT.
NOOO! STOP! DONNN'T--
BURANDO-DONO. NOT TO BE PRESUMP-TUOUS...
...BUT MAY I ASK SOME-THING?
RIGHT. NEXT!

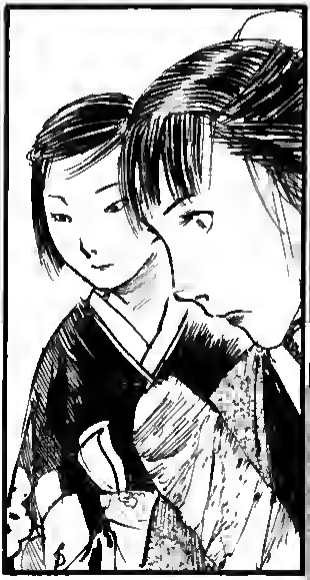
THIS SURGERY YOU'RE DOING...?
HOW IS IT ANY DIFFERENT...
...FROM BEFORE YOU WERE JAILED?
AS FAR AS I CAN SEE...
...YOU'RE JUST... DOING IT FASTER.
HM? YOU THINK SO?
MAYBE IT'S GOING TO LOOK LIKE THAT...
...BUT I TELL YOU, TORAEMON. I'LL EXPLAIN WHY LATER, BUT...
...THESE LAST FEW DAYS...?
I'M SHIVERING IN ANTICIPATION OF A FABULOUS OUTCOME!
YES! IF WE KEEP UP THE PACE...

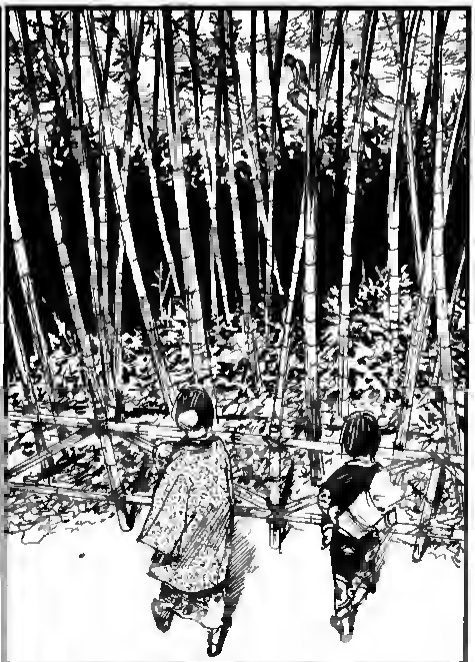
HEY!
ARM'S STICKING OUT.
SORRY.
...?
...WE'LL REACH THE NEXT STAGE IN TWO DAYS!
I CAN'T TAKE THIS...

HAFF...
NO OPENING ANY-WHERE...
...I'M STARV-ING.
GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT...



HUH...?
WHAT'S
THAT?

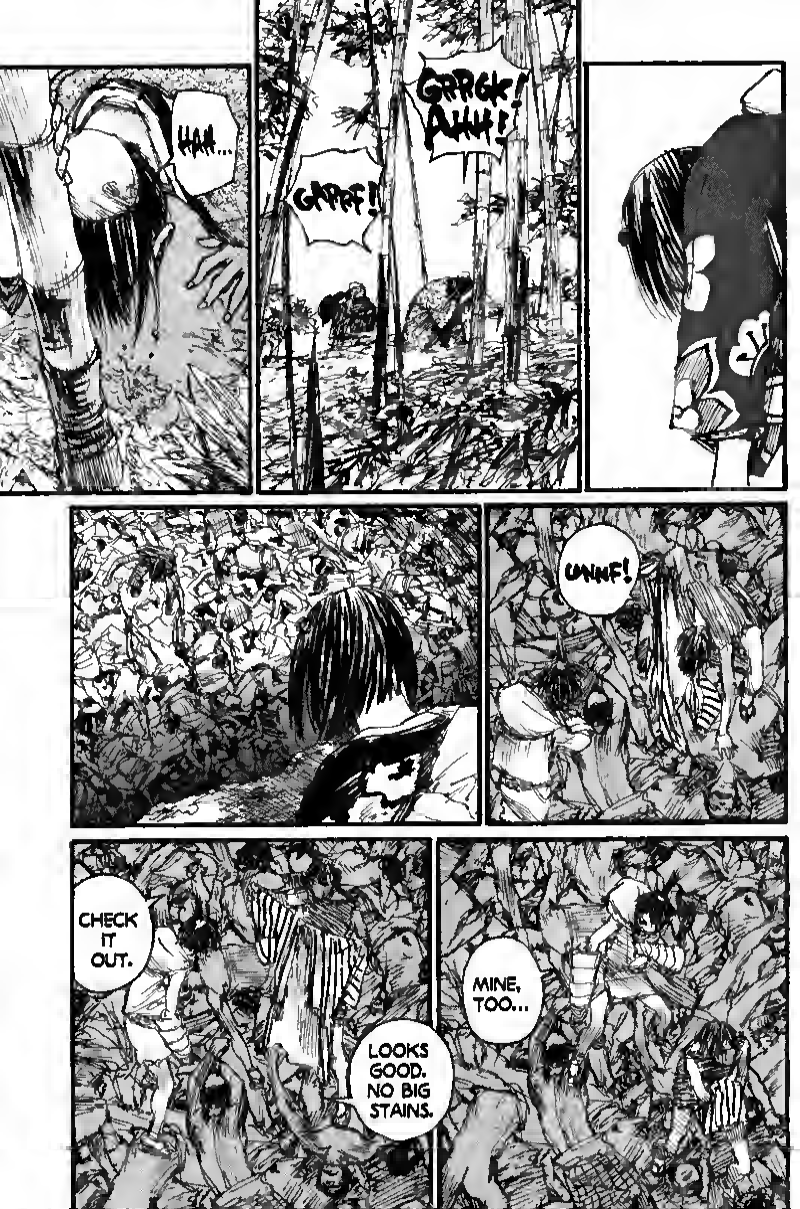




PICKING BAMBOO SHOOTS?
HM? MAYBE NOT?
THAT BAG...
THAT SIZE...
.....
.....
.....

HEAVE HO.

END
.....
.....
.....


HAH...
GRRGK AHH!
GAFF!
UNNF!
CHECK IT OUT.
LOOKS GOOD. NO BIG STAINS.
MINE, TOO...

SHING!
DŌA...?
HN?

.....
.....
.....
EHHH ?!

AIIYAAA!!
DŌA! DON'T!!
.....
.....
.....!

GGHH!
SLRK
WOOAH!
DŌA...
!!

WAIT!
WAIT!
WAIT!
N-NOT
ME!
WRONG
GUY!
H-
HELLP...
ENOUGH!

YOU'RE TARNISHING THE ITTŌ-RYŪ'S NAME!

...WHAT... DID YOU...?
DŌ\...

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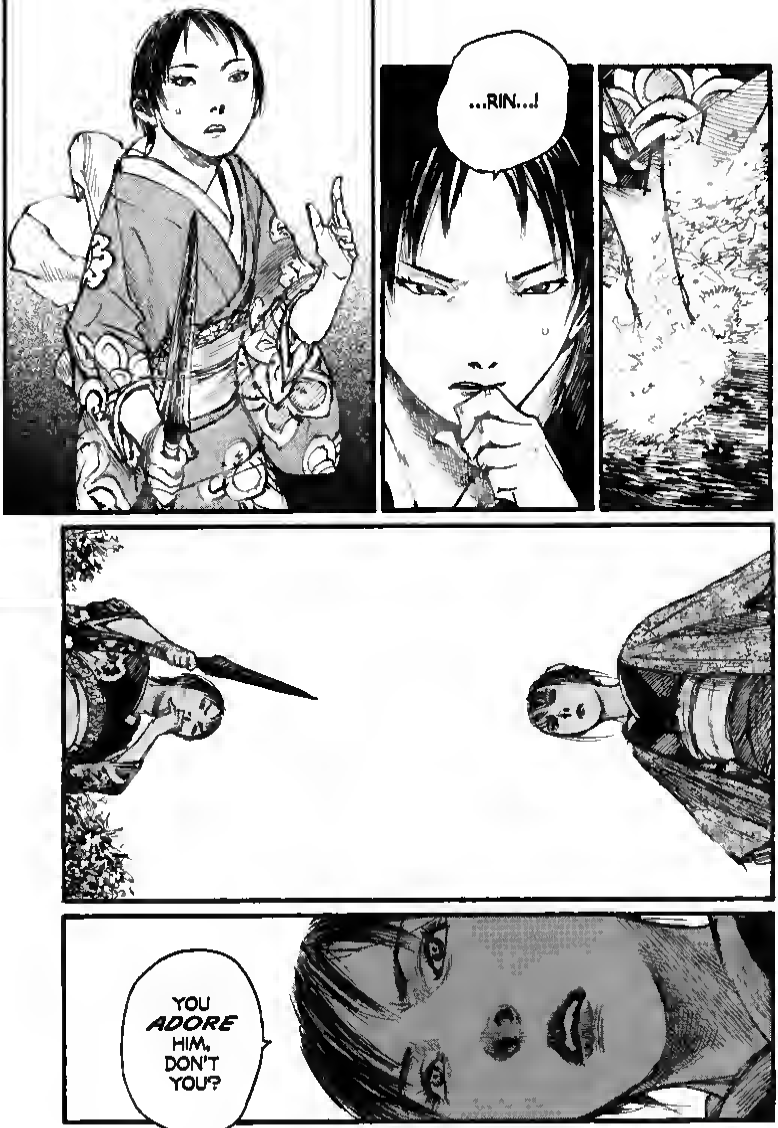
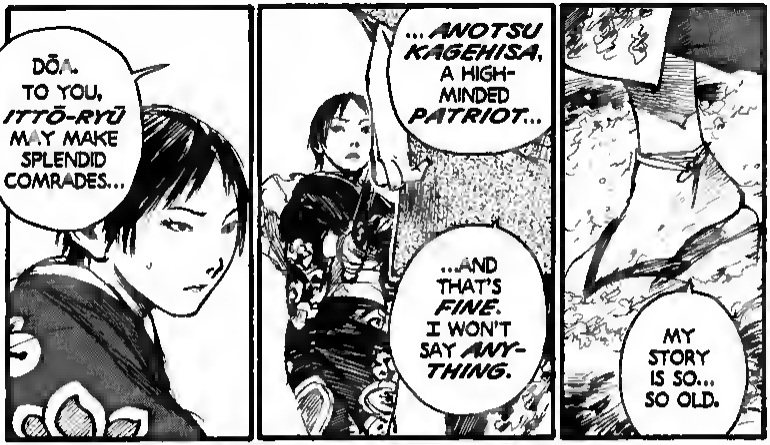
BAREFOOT
Part 4

HOW DID YOU KNOW...?!
DŌA...
SO... IT'S TRUE.
HOW'D YOU KNOW ?!

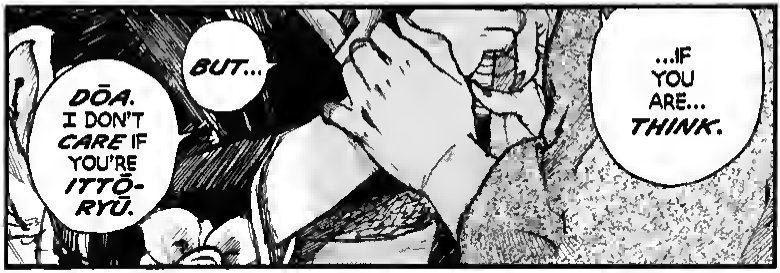
BEFORE... WHEN WE SAW KASHIN KOJI.
NO... TO BE HONEST...
...SINCE THE VERY FIRST TIME I SAW YOU FIGHT.
SOME-THING WAS TELLING ME. DEEP INSIDE.
BUT TODAY... I KNEW.
THE WAY YOU GUYS TALKED...?
EACH WORD, INNOCENT TO MOST EARS...
...BUT START SUSPECT-ING... AND EVERYTHING FIT.
THAT "BOSS" OF HIS. THAT'S...
... ANOTSU KAGEHISA, YES?!

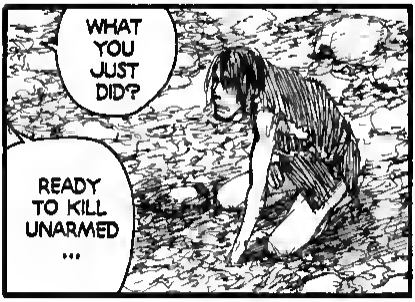

...RIN...!
YOU ADORE HIM, DON'T YOU?

HE'S AN AMAZ-ING MAN!!
I...
...I'VE HAD SO MANY EXPERIENCES WITH THE ITTŌ-RYŪ.
SO MANY, MANY KINDS...
...AND ALMOST ALL OF THEM...
...THINGS I WISH I COULD FORGET.

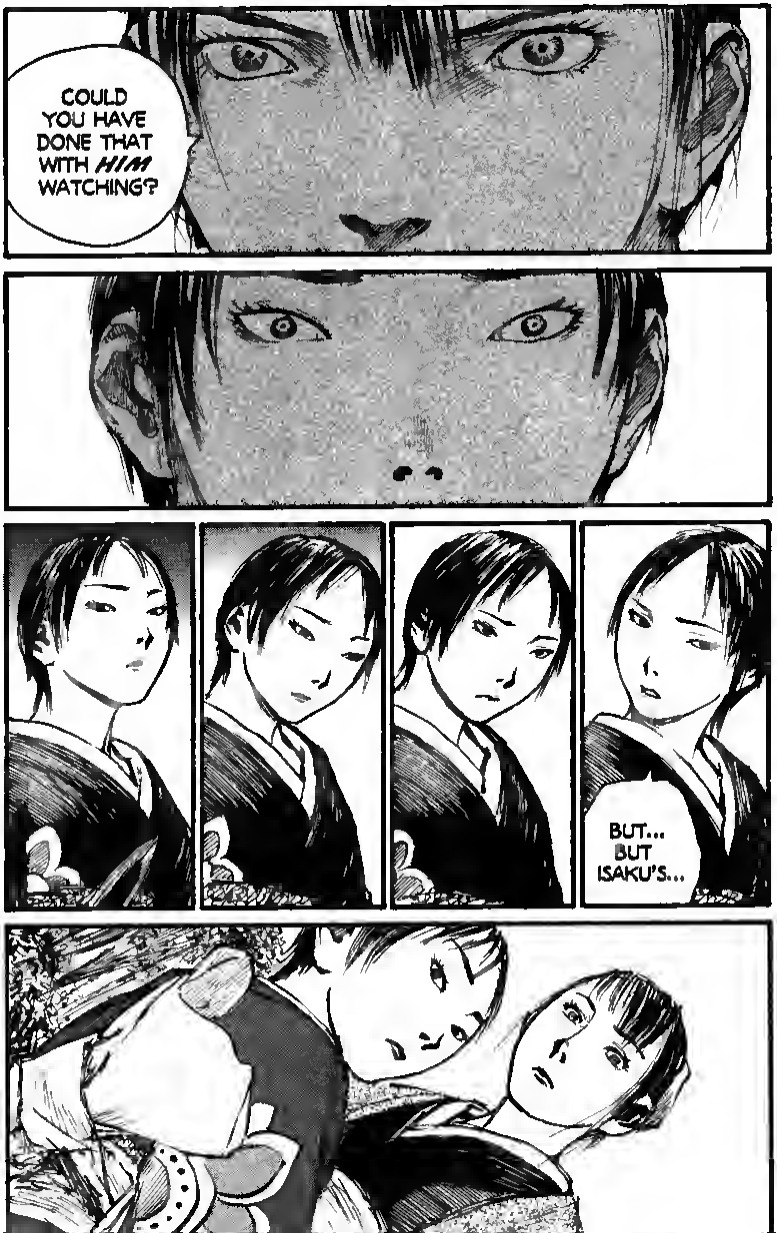

DŌA. TO YOU, ITTŌ-RYŪ MAY MAKE SPLENDID COMRADES...
...ANOTSU KAGEHISA, A HIGH-MINDED PATRIOT...
...AND THAT'S FINE. I WON'T SAY ANY-THING.
MY STORY IS SO... SO OLD.

SO OLD YOU NEVER EVEN HEARD ABOUT IT.


...IF YOU ARE... THINK.
BUT...
DŌA. I DON'T CARE IF YOU'RE ITTŌ-RYŪ.


WHAT YOU JUST DID?
READY TO KILL UNARMED ...

...UNRE-SISTING PEOPLE? FROM BEHIND?


COULD YOU HAVE DONE THAT WITH *HIM* WATCHING?
BUT... BUT ISAKU'S...

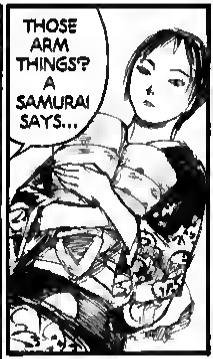
H-
H-
HERE...
THESE ARM GUARDS. WHERE...?
W-WARN'T US, MA'AM. THEM OFFICIALS--
TELL ME.

OFFI-CIALS?!
YOU DIDN'T STRIP THEM?!
O-O-OVER THAR', MA'AM...
GOT 'EM FROM THE BADGER HOLE GUARDS.
DEEP IN THET BAMBOO.
"BADGER HOLE"...?
WE JES' CALLS IT THAT, MA'AM, BUT...
...BUT IT'S THERE! GOIN' DEEP LIKE A BADGER LAIR...

...DON'T GOT A CLUE WHERE IT GO, UH-UHN!
BUT, LISSEN! TWO, THREE TIMES A DAY? THEM DOORS OPEN...
...AN' CORPSES COME OUT! CORPSES!

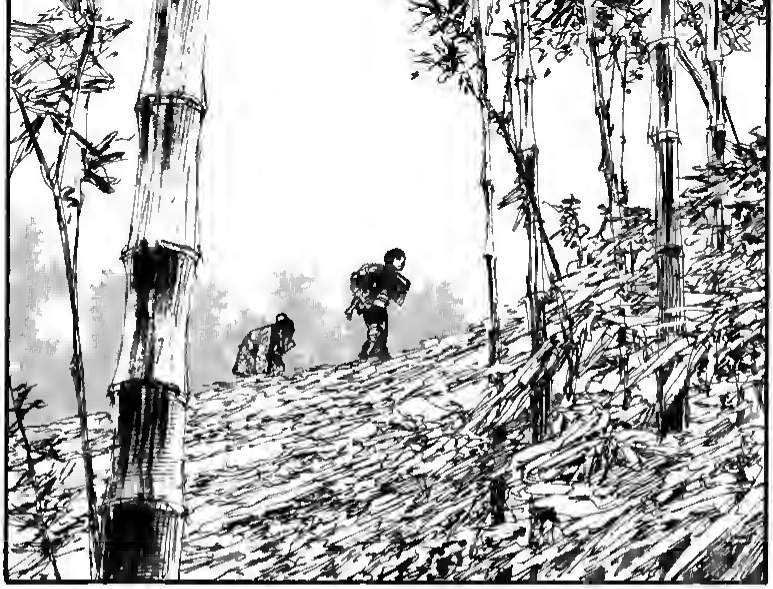
IT'S OUR JOB T'CARRY 'EM FAR AS THE RIVER.
OFFICIALS SAID THEY'S GONNA CREMATE 'EM...

...BUT JES' LOOK AT 'EM!
WHEN'S THEY GONNA BURY 'EM NOW?


THOSE ARM THINGS? A SAMURAI SAYS...

..."GUY THEY BROUGHT IN WORED 'EM.
"KEEP 'EM FOR A SOUVENIER."

WHEN WAS THAT?!
EH? EH?!
MAY... MAYBE TEN DAYS AGO...?
DŌA...



"WE WAIT BY THE BADGER HOLE AFTER EIGHT...AN' THE BODIES COME OUT.

"IF THERE'S MORE COMIN'...
"...THEY SAY COME BACK AT TWO...

"...AN' SOMETIMES WE GO THREE TIMES A DAY..."

RIN. LET'S GO HOME AND GET READY.
EH? READY FOR WHAT?
TWO INSIDE. NO... THERE'RE MORE.
TO WASTE THEM! THE NEXT TIME THEY OPEN THE GRATING!
DON'T BE STUPID!
WHO'D YOU CALL STUPID?!
OUCH! OUCH! JUST...CALM DOWN!
AND KEEP QUIET!
LOOK, DŌA. THINK A MOMENT.
WHERE DO YOU THINK THAT TUNNEL GOES?

ME?
I THINK IT'S A BACK DOOR INTO EDO CASTLE.
EVEN WHAT KASHIN KOJI SAID!
IF IT IS, EVERY-THING DOVETAILS.
IMMOR-TALITY EXPERIMENTS?
THE SAN-MAWARI ARRESTING FOLK AND DRAGGING THEM IN? GUINEA PIGS!
AND SOME PERCENT... DIE.
ALL THOSE NAMELESS CORPSES...?
TAKE THEM OUT THE MAIN GATES, THE HATAMOTO GET ANTSY.

IT'S A GO-FUJŌ-MON!
SO THEY USE THIS TUNNEL TO DUMP THEM.
JUST THE OPPO-SITE.
...WHAT'S EASIER THAN THAT?
SO THAT'S PERFECT, RIGHT? WE BYPASS THE MAIN GATES...
THERE MAY BE LOTS OF THEM.
LIKE THAT ENTRANCE GRATE.
...WHAT DO WE DO NEXT?
AND EVEN IF WE CLEAR THEM ALL...
SINCE IT'S SO WEAK ON THE OUTSIDE, THE DEFENSES INSIDE'LL BE INCREDIBLE.

WE DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT EDO CASTLE.
RIN! YOU'RE SO USE-LESS!
BITCH, BITCH, BITCH! IT'S ALL YOU DO!
I... UHM... WELL, WE HAVE TO, SORTA, YOU KNOW...
SO... HOW SHOULD WE DO IT?
AND ALL THE WHILE, ISAKU'S...

HN? WHAT'S WRONG?
... ... AHHN?
I THINK... MAYBE... WE CAN.
HUH?!

YUP...
IT'LL
WORK.

WHEN I WAS JAILED, IN MY CELL...
...I SAW AGAIN THE NAGAYA OF MY YOUTH.
ONE DAY, A BONSAI ARTIST IN THE SAME NAGAYA...
IT'S HOW YOU GRAFT BRANCHES AND BUDS FROM ONE PLANT ONTO ANOTHER. FASCINATING. VERY DEEP.
...TAUGHT ME HOW TO DO TSUGIKI WITH CHERRY TREES. AH...NEVER HEARD OF TSUGIKI?
IF YOU THINK YOU CAN GRAFT ANY OLD PLANT, THINK AGAIN.
THERE'S COMPATI-BILITY.
FOR INSTANCE...
...CHERRY AND PLUM ARE RELATED, EASY TO GRAFT.
BUT PINE AND PLUM? FORGET IT.
COMPATIBLE AND INCOMPATIBLE PLANTS.

AND THEN... I SAW IT!
COULDN'T WE SAY THE SAME ABOUT MY SURGERIES?
THE FIVE MEN AFTER DEWA DIED.
IF THE PROCEDURE WAS THE SAME, THEN WHAT WAS THE PROBLEM?!
PLEASE THINK BACK. RECALL HOW THEY PERISHED...
THE BLOOD IN THEIR BODIES COAGULATED! EVERYWHERE!
AND AS A RESULT, ROTTING LIMBS. FAILED HEARTS AND LUNGS!
BECAUSE MANJI'S BLOOD MIXED WITH THEIRS!
IN OTHER WORDS, BAD BLOOD!
MAYBE, I THOUGHT, HUMANS HAVE BLOOD COMPATIBILITY...!

AND SO, I RECONSIDERED.
THE TOP PRIORITY *WASN'T* SURGERY. IT WAS MATCHING *BLOOD*.
BEFORE, WHEN I KILLED THOSE FIVE FELONS...
...I WAS *PARALYZED* BY FEAR... OF THE *FUTURE*.
BUT THINKING BACK...
... *ANYONE* COULD GET FIVE WITH BAD BLOOD.
WHAT CAN YOU LEARN FROM FIVE?
YOU NEED *MORE!* *MORE* AND *MORE* AND *MORE!!*

"LIKE SIFTING GOLD DUST FROM THE MUCK!"

...NNGH...
AH...?! HABAKI-DONO!
IT'S FINE. SIT.
.....
.....
.....
I'M AN ORDERLY, AND I STILL--
THAT'S AMAZING...
NO. I'M USED TO IT.
ALL THESE GUTS... THE SMELL...?
SIR... DOESN'T IT AFFECT YOU?

TORAEMON. DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY TYPES OF DEATH PENALTIES THERE WERE...
...IN CHINA?
EH... EH?!
CH- CHINA, SIR? PENAL- TIES?
PAR- DON?!
MM!
THEY SAY THE CONTI- NENTALS ARE CRUEL.
SO, AT LEAST... TEN?
HMPH.
TRUE, IN THE AGE OF WARRING STATES BEFORE THE HAN DYNASTY... AND IN THE THREE KINGDOMS PERIOD...
...THERE APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN CRUEL PUNISHMENTS. BOILING ALIVE. PICKLING IN SALT.
MEN GROW SAVAGE IN TIMES OF WAR AND DISORDER. IN OUR LAND AS WELL.

BUT IN THE DAYS OF THE HAN, FOR FOUR HUNDRED YEARS, RECORDS SPEAK OF ONLY TWO.
BEHEADING... AND A STROKE FROM THE SIDE. THAT'S ALL.
JUST TWO, SIR...?
NOW IF YOU WANT CRUELTY, THE PUNISHMENTS OF TAISEI ARE CRUELER, BY FAR.
DRAWN AND QUARTERED WITH HORSES. CUT OPEN AND FED TO THE BIRDS ALIVE.
THEY'VE PERFECTED SO MANY HORRENDOUS DEATHS, YOU HAVE TO ADMIRE THEIR CREATIVITY.
AND THAT'S NOT ALL. THEY HANG THE CORPSES AT STREET CORNERS, UNTIL THEY ROT THROUGH AND FALL...
.....
.....
.....
HEH HEH! TRUTH BE TOLD, I'M JUST REPEATING WHAT BURANDO TOLD ME.
BUT RIGHT AT THE END, HE SAID SOMETHING INTRIGUING...
...DAMN HIS HIDE.

THAT CRUEL-TY GAP, HE SAID...
...IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THEIR MEDICINE AND OURS.
IN THE NAME OF THE LAW, THEY TEAR PEOPLE LIMB FROM LIMB.
SKIN THEM. OPEN THEIR GUTS TO THE SUN.
COUNT-LESS PEOPLE SEE THAT. THE MASSES.
AND THAT KNOWLEDGE OF THE BODY, WELL...
...THAT, HE SAID, IS THE WELLSPRING OF RANPŌ.
EH HEH HEH!

AND YOU MEAN TO PROVE IT RIGHT HERE.
DON'T YOU, BURANDO?
W-WAIT, SIR. MY LEGS, THEY--
GET OVER HERE! NOW!
CAN'T WORK 'EM, SIR. HONEST!
WHAT DO WE DO?
CAN'T MOVE HIS LEGS, DOESN'T HAVE LEGS, DOESN'T MATTER!
P-PLEASE, SIR...

DAMN YOU! STAND UP!!
AUUGH!!
WAI-- OWW! IT HURTS!
.....
.....
.....
IN HIS PLACE.
UH... UHM... I... I CAN GO.
WHAT...?!
NO NEED TO TAKE... A SICK MAN.
IF... IF I'M OKAY, I'LL...

..I SEE...
WELL, TIME'S OF THE ESSENCE.
ARE YOU NUTS?
DON'T DO IT!
.....
.....
.....
CLANG

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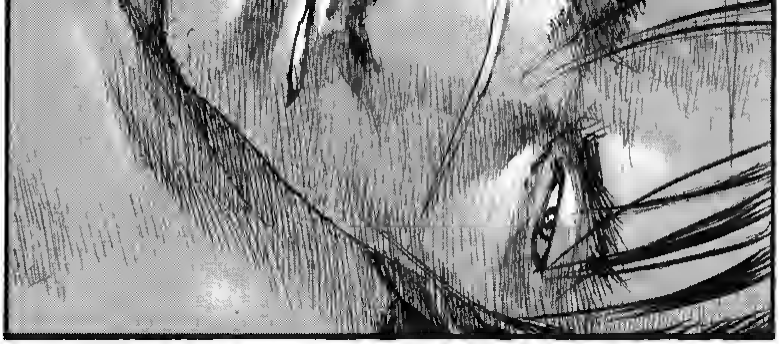
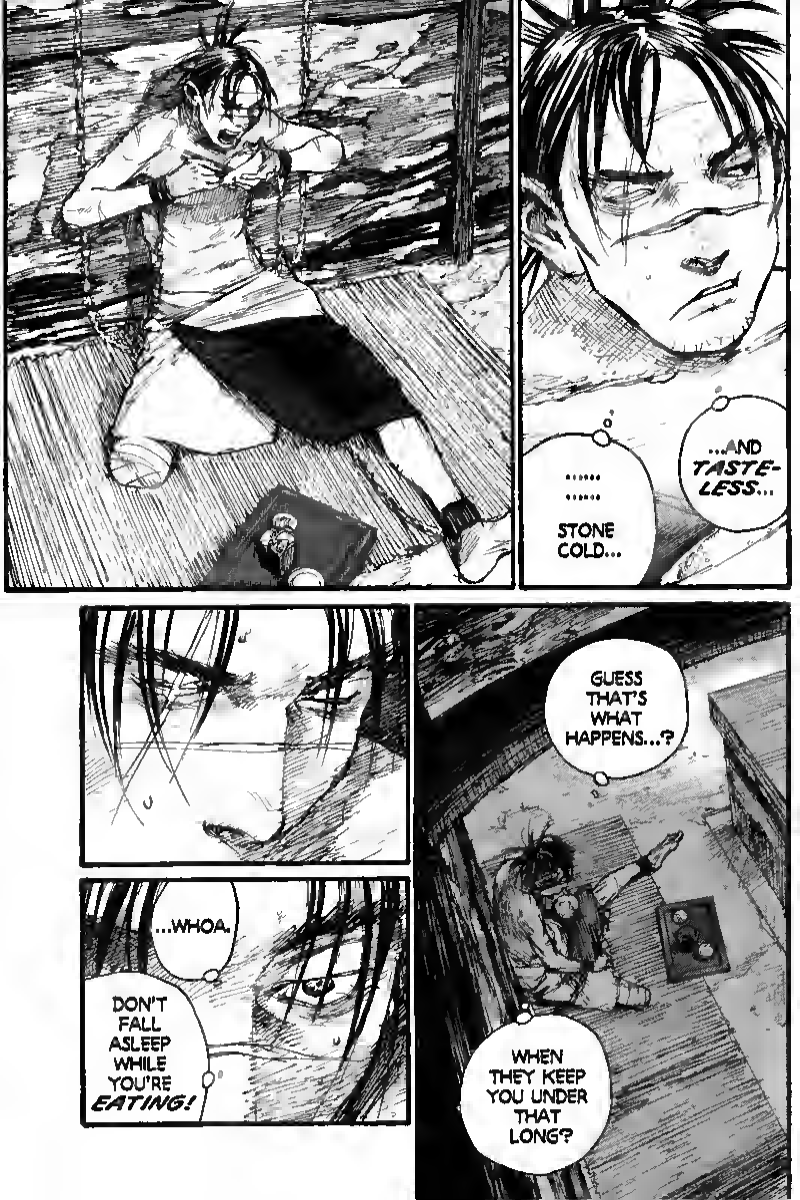
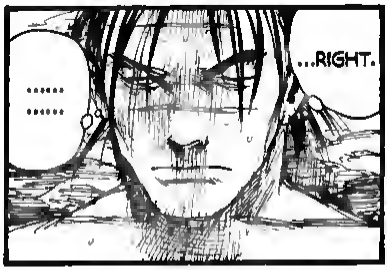
BAREFOOT
Part 5



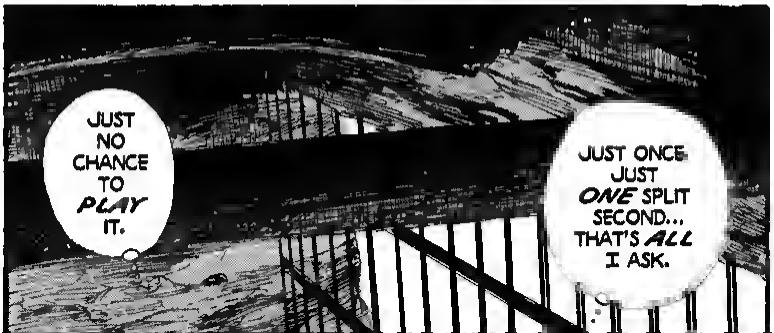
GAARG
...
...RNG...
...SHIT!


...AND TASTE-LESS...
.....
.....
STONE COLD...
GUESS THAT'S WHAT HAPPENS...?
WHEN THEY KEEP YOU UNDER THAT LONG?
...WHOA.
DON'T FALL ASLEEP WHILE YOU'RE EATING!

TUBE UP MY NOSE ALL DAY...
DRIP DRIP DRIP DRIP...
THANKS TO THAT... DON'T KNOW MUCH ANYMORE. WHO THEY'RE DRAGGING IN EACH DAY...
...WHAT'S HAPPENING TO THEM, NOTHING...
THOUGH, TRUTH IS...
...FROM HOW BAD THE SMELL'S GETTING...
...I CAN PRETTY WELL IMAGINE...
EAT?! IN THIS STENCH?!
BUT... I WILL EAT. FUCK YOU.
THE DAY I CAN'T EAT, I'M DONE FOR.


.....
.....
...RIGHT.

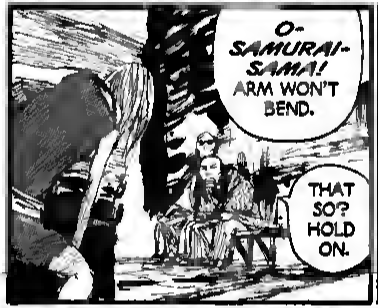
IT'S NOT OVER YET. STILL GOT A CARD...
...ONE SECRET CARD.


JUST NO CHANCE TO PLAY IT.
JUST ONCE. JUST ONE SPLIT SECOND... THAT'S ALL I ASK.

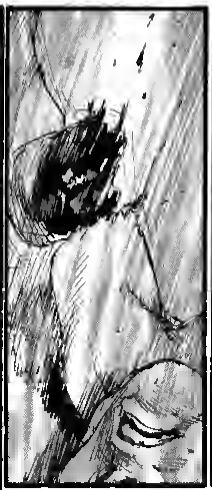
THEY'RE ALL HERE, SIR.
HERE WE GO AGAIN... DAMN BEGGARS.
SILENCE. SILENCE! FIRST OFF-- TOO MANY!
SOME OF YOU LEAVE!
MONEY FOR FOUR! PERIOD!
GO HOME, YOU!
NO, YOU GO!
NOW LISTEN UP! THEY'LL BRING IN BODIES WITH HOODS!
THIS IS WHAT YOU DO! REMOVE HOOD! FOLD LIMBS! STUFF BODY IN BAG!

JUTE BAGS ARE THERE.
OH, AND BEFORE THAT...
...DON'T FORGET TO SOAK THEM IN THE CHEMICAL BATH!
IT'LL SLOW THE ROT, KEEP OFF THE DOGS AND CROWS! CAN'T HAVE CROWS AROUND THE CASTLE!
IF THE LIMBS ARE TOO STIFF, CALL ME! I'LL CUT THEM OFF!
WHEN YOU'VE BAGGED THEM, DRAG THEM UP THE SLATS TO THE ENTRANCE. THE MEN THERE WILL GUIDE YOU.
THAT'S ALL!
REQUEST DISPOSAL!
HOH! HERE AL-READY?
SNAP TO IT! GET TO WORK!
CAN'T STAND IT...

HANG IN THERE. ONLY THREE DAYS LEFT.
MY OWN DAUGHTER WRINKLES HER NOSE..
STINKING BODIES... STINKING BEGGARS... DRIVES ME CRAZY...


O-SAMURAI-SAMA! ARM WON'T BEND.
THAT SO? HOLD ON.

HAH HAH HAH!
NO REST FOR THE WEARY...



O-O-O-SAMURAI-SAMAAA!!
WHAT IS IT NOW?!
WHAT THE 'ELL?!
...GEH?!
uhewf..
GOOD WORK.
...?!
WHAT THE--?

WHAT HAPPENED TO HIS HAND?!
STEADY. PULL STEADY...
OW! OW! OWW!
WHAT THE... DEVIL'D YOU DO?
JUST GOT A GRIP ON IT T' BEND IT IN...
THAZ WHAT I WANNA KNOW!
.....
.....
WHAT'S GOING ON DOWN THERE...?!

ぐは!
ぐは!
ぐは!
ぐふ...
THE DAY HAS COME AT LAST...
...HABAKI-DONO!

...THERE WAS ONE BEFORE... BUT A LITTLE ACCIDENT...
EXACTLY! THOUGH, TRUTH BE TOLD...
UHUH!
YOU SAY THIS MAN IS...?
GUHF...
OH!
YES, SIR. TORA-EMON!
NO MATTER. SHOW ME.
YES, WELL...
SIR!
...BUT NOT A SURGERY ISSUE... AN ACCIDENT. THAT'S ALL.
SO AGITATED HE CHOKED ?!

MEW...
YEEOW...!!
GUWOHHH!!
YOU IDIOT! HOLD HIM DOWN!
S-SORRY, SIR.

GUH!
UGH!
GUOE
UH!
SLLK
UUNG...
OHH...

.....
.....
.....
AS OF TODAY-- NEARLY TEN!
AND MORE-OVER, HABAKI-DONO, HE'S NOT THE FIRST TO REACH THIS STAGE.
UNLIKE DEWA-NOSUKE, HE'S NOT WEAKENING.
Gulp! Gulp!

HEH HEH HEH HEH...
AT THIS RATE...
...SUCCESS! BY THE FIRST SNOW.
?!
GWAPP!

MMMG...
MMF...
OHH...!
OHOH...
.....
.....
.....
UNGF...

THOSE EYES...
WAS IT, BURANDO?
...“AGITATION”... WAS LIKE THIS?
I SEE. SO THE OTHER'S...
WHY DOES IT HAPPEN?
SIR... I CAN'T SAY FOR CERTAIN.
IN THE END... THE TOLL THAT THE MULTIPLE SURGERIES AND BODILY CHANGES TAKE ON...
...MIND AND SPIRIT... IS, UH, EXTREME.

I SEE.
IN OTHER WORDS, THIS MAN IS A FAILURE?
B-B-BUT...
EITHER THE BODY WASTES AWAY OR... THE MIND.
IF WE FIND ONE WHO CAN BEAR IT, THEN...!
...IT'S NOT HOPE-LESS!
KCHK
--WAIT! PLEASE! HABAKI-DONO...!
BURAN-DO.
W-W--

I TOLD YOU. IF HE ISN'T UNERRING...
...HE'S USELESS.
TRRR
STOP CHANGING YOUR DAMN MOOD EVERY SECOND!
HABAKI KAGIMURA-DONO!!
HUH?!
...!
B-B-BURA--!!

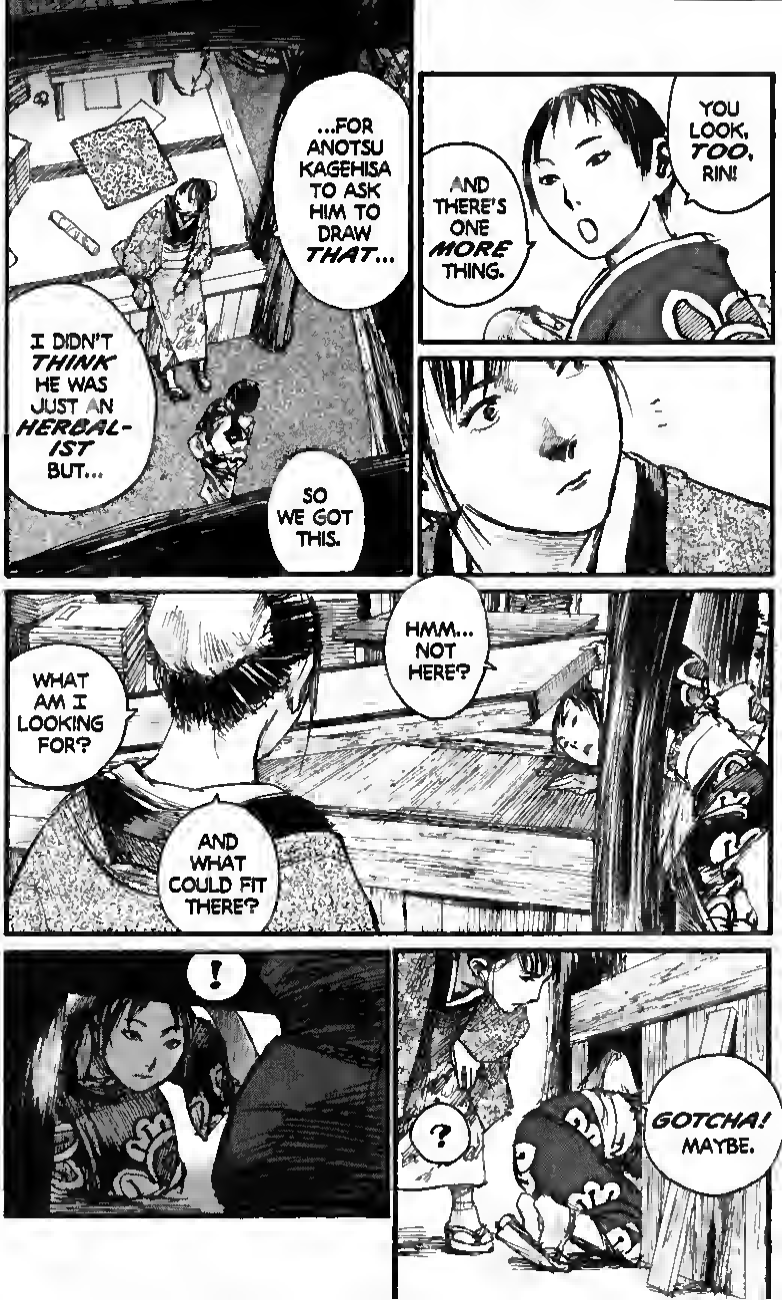
LET ME ASK YOU! JUST WHAT ARE YOU SEEKING ?!
A HEART THAT WON'T RISK FAILURES...
...OR A HEART THAT OVER-COMES THEM?!
YOU'RE IN NO POSITION TO SHRUG AND SAY SORRY! THAT IT DIDN'T WORK!
HABAKI-DONO! YOU VE GONE DEEP IN DEBT TO KEEP THIS EXPERIMENT GOING.
YOU OWE THE GO-RŌJŪ! THE WAKA-DOSH!YOR!! THE BUGYŌ!
AM I WRONG ?!
AND ME, TOO!!
I DESERTED MY COUNTRY! I PROVE MYSELF HERE, OR I DIE.
I'M STAK!NG MY LIFE! ON THIS!

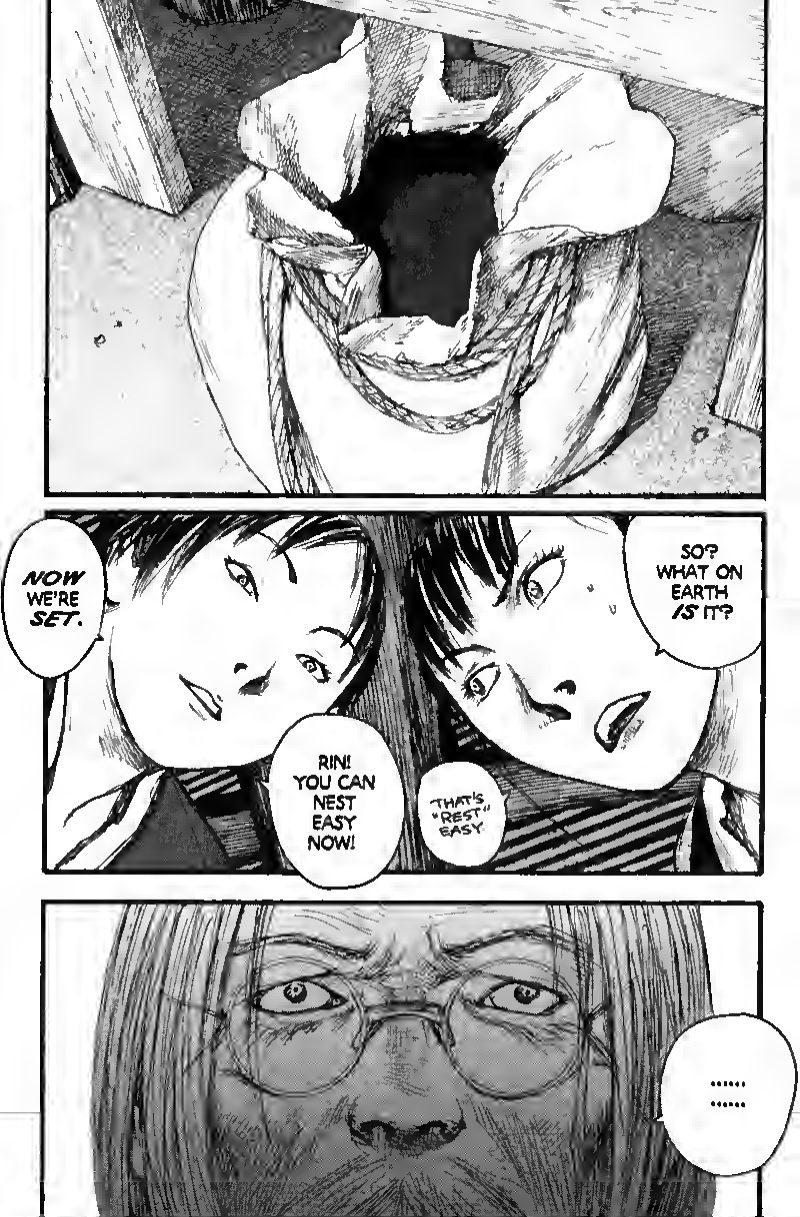
HABAKI-DONO! FROM THE DAY YOU LET ME INTO THE CASTLE...
...YOUR LIFE AND MY LIFE HAVE BEEN ON THAT SURGERY TABLE!
I WILL NOT LET YOU PLAY AROUND LIKE I DON'T EXIST!
GRRRR!!

RIN! OVER THERE!
WHO ARE ALL THOSE PEOPLE?
...?
MY EYES AREN'T AS GOOD AS YOURS!
...AHH.

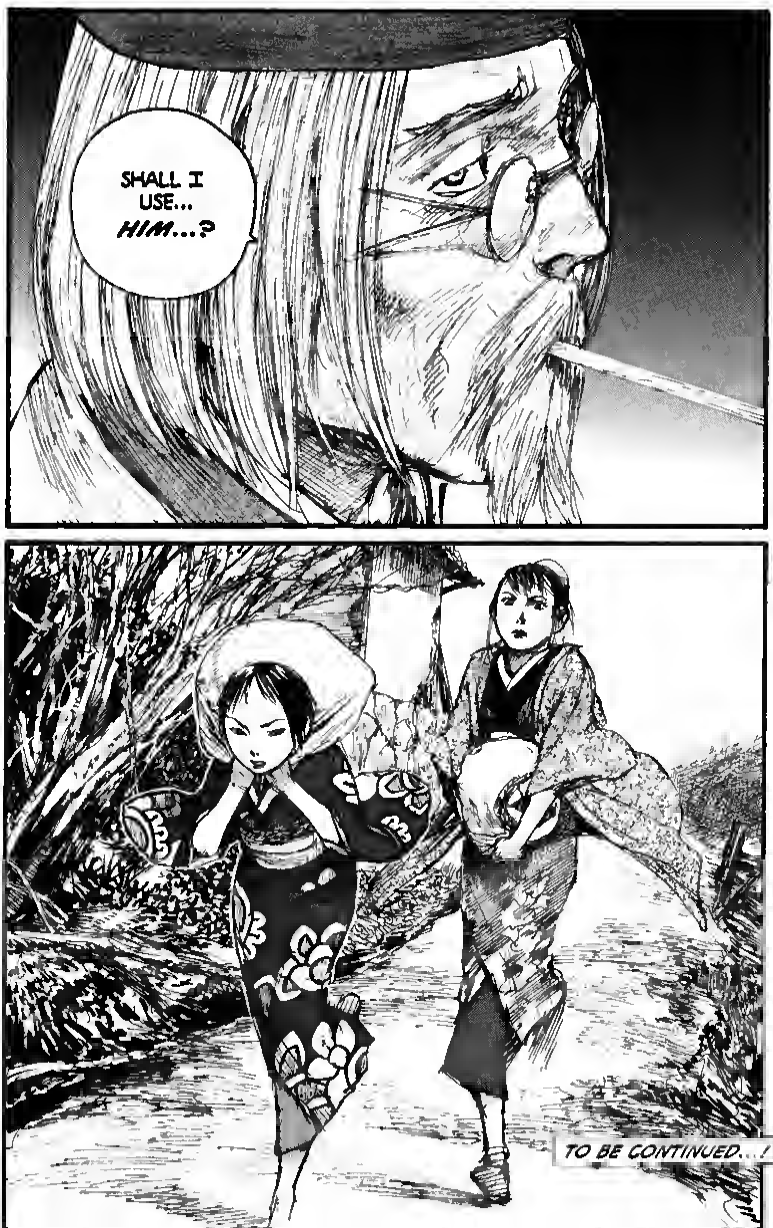
I SUSPECT... WOMEN LIKE *US*. THEIR MEN DRAGGED OFF BY THE *SAN-MAWARI*...
...NEVER TO COME BACK.
THEY'VE LOST PATIENCE AND GONE TO THE *BUGYŌSHO*, BUT...IT'S HOPELESS.
I DOUBT THE *O-BUGYŌ-SAMA* HIMSELF KNOWS WHAT'S *REALLY* GOING ON.
OUTRAGE-OUS...

DOESN'T THE OLD FART [redacted] WORK?!
IF WE COME BACK LATER...
NO TIME FOR THAT!
THIS. LOOKY.
EH HEH HEH! GOOD THING HE WASN'T HERE.
DŌA! YOU CAN'T JUST GO--!
OH...HECK. I DON'T FEEL LIKE STOPPING YOU, NOT NOW.


...FOR ANOTSU KAGEHISA TO ASK HIM TO DRAW THAT...
I DIDN'T THINK HE WAS JUST AN HERBAL-IST BUT...
SO WE GOT THIS.
AND THERE'S ONE MORE THING.
YOU LOOK, TOO, RIN!
HMM... NOT HERE?
WHAT AM I LOOKING FOR?
AND WHAT COULD FIT THERE?
!
?
GOTCHA! MAYBE.


SO? WHAT ON EARTH *IS* IT?
NOW WE'RE *SET*.
RIN! YOU CAN NEST EASY NOW!
"THAT'S "REST" EASY.
.....
.....

TUT, TUT...
OBVIOUSLY NOT AFTER MONEY...!
TINY FOOT-PRINTS. YOU LITTLE FOOL.
YOU WANTED THIS?
DON'T BLAME ME IF THE TŌSHŪ'S FURIOUS.
...YOU FOUND YOURSELF SOME REAL TROUBLE.
NEED TO ACT FAST, BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE.
PLUS, I SEE...
.....
.....


SHALL I USE... HIM...?
TO BE CONTINUED...!

GLOSSARY

Ainu: natives of the Japanese archipelago who were driven north by today's modern Japanese population, now found only on the northern main island of Hokkaidō

akabon: Edo-period illustrated novels

bangashira: head of the *hanshū*

bangoku barbarian countries A general term for the West.

banshū: officers serving under the shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the shogun himself

basho ukeonin: traders licensed to deal with the Ainu

bateren: a corruption of the word *padre*, for the Portuguese priests who arrived in sixteenth-century Japan

bugyō: a high-ranked samurai in charge of keeping the peace with the help of the men under his command and volunteer "posse" members

bugyōsho: Edo-era equivalent of a police precinct station

chō: a section of a city

daimyō: the lords of provincial feudal fiefs known as *han*

dōjō: a school for martial arts training; here, for swordsmanship

dono: archaic honorific used to show respect, usually for someone of higher rank

dōshin: low-ranking police officers

Edo: capital of pre-modern Japan, later renamed Tokyo

fujomon: side gate for carrying out the dead

gō-rojū: senior councilors to the shogun, picked from the most trusted feudal lords

gotten-i: doctors employed by the feudal lords serving under the shogun

go-yō: literally, "official business," but in practice this was a police command to surrender to authorities. Police posses carried *go-yō* lanterns

Hachōbori: a district in Edo, slang for the police constables who patrolled that area

Honcho Suikoden: also known as the *Yoshino Monogatari* This Edo epic, published in 1773, was a Japanese re-telling of the Chinese Ming dynasty classic *Shui hu chuan*, known in the West as both *The Water Margin* and *Outlaws of the Marsh*. The Japanese version includes the exploits of an Ainu warlord.

han: a feudal domain

hatamoto: the most trusted of the shogun's followers. *Hatamoto daimyō* were given the choicest and most strategic *han* fiefdoms after the Tokugawa unified Japan

Ittō-ryū: the radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa

jitte: three-pronged truncheon carried by Edo policemen

kachi: a foot soldier

Kaga: a remote feudal domain on the Japan Sea coast southwest of Edo

kanpō: Chinese-based medicine, relying heavily on medicinal plants

kessen-chu: mystical bloodworms that can heal all wounds and grant their host virtual immortality

Kirishitan: Christian

machi-bugyō: one of the top governing bodies in Edo, a magistrate with the combined powers of mayor and chief of police Their rule extended only to commoners, as samurai were controlled by their own *daimyō*

Mugan-ryū: a group of criminals who worked as assassins for the shogunate earning their freedom by killing assigned targets Disbanded by Habaki Kagimura

Mutemichi-ryū: the sword school led by Rin's father (now deceased), destroyed by Anotsu Kagehisa

nanban: southern barbarians Westerners were called this because their ships first reached Japan from the South

obi: a broad fabric band used to close kimono and other traditional dress

okara: soy pulp, soft leftovers from making tofu, used in cooking or eaten alone

okappiki: an Edo-era policeman who was a commoner, sometimes a former criminal, and could not carry a sword

o-shiroi: white powder makeup of the Edo period, still worn by *geisha* and their *maiko* apprentices

ranpō: specifically, Dutch medicine, generally, Western medicine

ryū: a sword school

sanmawari: three groups of *dōshin* who performed specific patrol and criminal investigation duties

shinbangata: another term for *bangashira*

shirasu: both a court and an interrogation chamber where guilt was determined by whatever means necessary, including torture

shitappiki: another name for a lower-class, Edo-era policeman

shūgoku: warden of Kodenma prison

Taisei: Europe

ten: doctor to the shogun and his ministers

tōmizutso: a telescope, literally "far sight tube"

tōshu: leader, master

wakadoshiyori: an advisory council of lords who were the hands-on managers of the shogunate bureaucracy

yoriki: middle-ranked samurai who dealt with criminal or judicial affairs